

A Review of the Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Corrective Feedback

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Abstract: Corrective feedback, as one of the most important research topics in recent years, has attracted much attention in the field of second language acquisition. This paper will outline the factors affecting the effectiveness of corrective feedback based on nearly 20 pieces of high-quality literature in recent years. The results of the analysis show that the effectiveness of corrective feedback is mainly influenced by external pedagogical differences, which can be categorized into the different types of corrective feedback and the different targets of corrective feedback, and learners' individual differences, which can be categorized into the learners' language proficiency and learners' emotions. In a number of studies, scholars have also expressed that corrective feedback will still occupy a significant position in teaching in the future, and more scholars still need to pay attention to its significance and conduct exploratory research.

Keywords: Corrective Feedback; External Pedagogical Differences; Learners' Individual Differences.

1. Definition of Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback (CF) has been defined and named differently from three major fields: the pedagogical field of second language teaching and learning, the linguistic field of language acquisition, and the psychological field of concept learning (Schachter, 1991). Until today, there is still no unity among these three fields, and the following section only reviewed the evolution of the definition in the pedagogical and linguistic field.

Frisby (1957) considered CF to have three processes in learning a language: receiving the knowledge from the teacher or the educational materials, fixing it in the memory by repetition, and using it in actual practice until it becomes a personal skill. Chaudron defined CF as a 'complex phenomenon with several functions' (1988, p.152), but recently CF has been defined simply further as 'responses to learner utterances containing an error' (Ellis, 2006). Other scholars have begun to define CF in terms of the classroom environment. Lyster et al. (2013) argued that CF is an inherent part of classroom practices in which teachers engage to achieve instructional objectives that include consolidation of learners' L2 knowledge. Nassaji and Kartchava (2017) supplemented that CF is the instructors' answers as the correction of students' mistakes during the production of a second language.

In the second language acquisition literature, CF is known as negative evidence, defined as information about what is not possible in a given language (Gass, 2003). The difference between CF and negative evidence is that CF, which is reactive, is mainly provided in response to errors, while negative evidence, which is both reactive and preemptive, can be obtained through CF on errors and also through the explanation and presentation of grammatical rules that intend to inform the learner of nontarget-like uses of the language (Nassaji, 2016, 2021). When negative evidence occurs reactively (i.e., corrective feedback), it can be either in the form of overt responses with a primary intention to correct that form or in the form of implicit feedback in which the correction occurs when the primary focus is on meaning.

Corrective feedback can be divided into two categories

according to different modes: oral CF and written CF, and also can be divided into six types (Tedick, & Gortari, 1998), including explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic clues, elicitation, and repetition. Explicit correction indicates "the student's utterance was incorrect and the teacher provides the correct form". Recast without directly means "the teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error or provides the correction". For clarification requests, by using phrases like "Excuse me?" or "I don't understand," the teacher states that "the message has not been understood or the student's utterance contains mistakes and that a repetition or reformulation is required". "Without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance" (e.g. "Do we say it like that?" and "Is it feminine?"). This kind of CF is called metalinguistic clues. Elicitation refers to "the teacher directly eliciting the correct form from the student by asking questions and pausing to allow the student to complete the teacher's utterance or by asking students to reformulate the utterance". Elicitation questions differ from metalinguistics clues questions because they require more than a yes or no response. Repetition means "The teacher repeats the student's error and adjusts intonation to draw the student's attention to it".

Over the past two decades, a large amount of research has examined various factors affecting the effectiveness of CF mainly including external pedagogical differences and learners' individual differences (Luquin, Roothoof, 2019). This paper will mainly review in terms of these two aspects.

2. External Pedagogical Differences

Starting from the external pedagogical differences, the researchers mainly focus on three aspects, including different types of CF, different targets of CF, and interactional settings (Luquin, Roothoof, 2019). This part will mainly review the first two.

2.1. Different Types of Corrective Feedback

From the perspective of modes of CF, Wiboolyasarini (2023) has argued that oral or written corrective feedback on language learning can lead to learners' different

understandings and reactions. The teachers' written and verbal CF during formative assessment can positively affect the learners' academic performance (Patra, et. al, 2022). Video CF which had more of a 'human touch' than other feedback formats such as audio or written could have presented a better result (Martin, et.al, 2022). In terms of types of CF, the beginner and the advanced learners made significant progress with the help of metalinguistic feedback (Geçkin, 2020). Recasts and the metalinguistic feedback produced the same results, but students receiving recasts appeared to perform better than those in the metalinguistic group (Luquin, Roothoof, 2019). In terms of the timing of corrective feedback, Fu and Li (2022,2023) showed that to enhance the outcomes of feedback CF should be provided immediately after learners' initial exposure to a linguistic structure (immediate CF) rather than after learners practice using the structure in communicative activities (delayed CF). The timing of the feedback inevitably led to some differences. Li, Ellis and Zhu (2016) also argued that delayed and immediate feedback differs in that the former constitutes an elicitation and the latter a repetition of the learner's erroneous utterance.

However, there are also some researches showing that different CF cannot affect the effectiveness anymore. Formative and summative feedback were given either orally or in written form with a variety of benefits in the world of language learning and teaching and showed almost similar outcomes (Hussain, et.al, 2023). Direct and indirect WCF were equally effective for the learning of past counterfactual conditionals. The feedback was operationalized as corrective recasts, and the results may have been different had other corrective strategies been provided (Shao et.al, 2023).

2.2. Different Targets of Corrective Feedback

Different targets of CF are also an important influencing factor. Fu and Li (2022) showed that if the study not only selected target verbs in the achievement tests, the outcomes to measure L2 development of rule-based grammatical structures may be influenced. They also expressed this idea further in another study (2023) that if the target structure was changed to be a non-salient structure such as the English definite ("the") and indefinite ("a/an") articles, different effectiveness of feedback may lead to. Li, Ellis, and Zhu (2016) found that the effectiveness of the immediate and control groups showed larger effect sizes for the performance of regular verbs than irregular verbs. The advantages of immediate feedback were only evident in the grammatical judgment, and only in the learners' explicit knowledge.

Hussain et al. (2023) confirmed that targeted vocabulary and pronunciation problems may be more essential and obvious because these aspects not only contribute to breakdowns in communication but also lead to greater learning outcomes. Likewise, Luquin and Roothoof (2019) also claimed that the effectiveness of oral CF directed at phonological targets was unstable, and other pronunciation targets are worthy of further investigation. Furthermore, Wiboolyasarín et al. (2023) conducted their study in universities where Thai is the language of instruction and argued that the results may have limited generalizability to other institutional contexts.

3. Learners' Individual Differences

Starting from learners' individual differences, the researchers mainly focus on language proficiency level,

foreign language anxiety, working memory, etc. This part will mainly review the first two.

3.1. Learners' Proficiency Level

Wiboolyasarín et al. (2023) clarified that based on proficiency level and L1 background, peer correction, recast, and private feedback can reveal differences. The beginner-level learners believed in the effectiveness of clarification requests and elicitation more than the advanced group did. The pre-intermediate group was of the opinion that no CF could also help them, an opinion with which the beginner and the intermediate group did not agree at all (Geçkin, 2020). Patra (2022) considered intermediate levels of learners as the participants and proved the effect of academic anxiety and attitudes toward learning on the effectiveness of written and verbal CF. Moreover, Patra argued that it is valuable to conduct similar studies in other contexts and on other levels of proficiency to retest the results. Shao et.al (2023) have found that for the learners who tended to have a relatively low proficiency level, an edge for direct WCF was reported, but the high-intermediate proficiency level students might have stood a similar chance of benefiting from direct and indirect WCF as they were probably able to correct most of their errors once they had been pointed out. Fu and Li (2023) also provided the concept that ceiling effects (resulting from learners' excessive prior knowledge) would greatly affect the effectiveness of the feedback.

So, it can be concluded that different levels of learners can benefit from different types of corrective feedback, or that the same type of feedback can lead to different results due to different levels of learners.

3.2. Learners' Emotions

Learners' emotions, such as language enjoyment (Wiboolyasarín, 2023), learners' preferences (Patra, 2022), and learning attitude (Patra, 2022), etc. can greatly affect the outcomes of CF. Teachers and students diverge on whether errors should be corrected immediately. While teachers are hesitant to correct students' errors immediately, students favor immediate feedback. Learners' preference influences their attitudes toward feedback, further influencing effectiveness (Fu & Li, 2022). Different learners have different preferences, which can account for the usefulness of feedback to some extent (Geçkin, 2020).

Foreign language anxiety is one of the most important academic emotions so the research related to the two has become more and more popular (Nassaji & Kartchava, 2021). In 2012, DeKeyser put forward a type of research called ATI (Aptitude-Treatment Interaction), and aptitude refers to any individual difference variable that contributes to the learners' readiness for the successful performance of a learning task. DeKeyser called for more ATI research on the grounds that such research "not only tells us about the importance of the internal variable, the external variable, and their joint impact on the outcome variable but also about the process that links them" (p. 192). Adopting an ATI design, lots of studies investigated whether anxiety has differential associations with the effectiveness of different types of feedback (Fu & Li, 2022, 2023; Geçkin, 2020; Luquin & Roothoof, 2019; Hussain et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2022).

Most studies found that there is a negative relationship between anxiety and the effectiveness of CF. Anxiety may break the balance between a goal-directed system and a stimulus-driven system and trigger or magnify the threat-

related aspects of CF (Fu & Li, 2023). Based on an empirical study of teachers' provision of writing feedback, Li Hang (2013) found that anxiety significantly and negatively predicted writing self-efficacy, and the latter significantly affected learners' writing performance. In recent years, Liang Zhongshu and Gao Ying (2020), adjusted their research horizon to providing writing feedback through peers and similarly found that peer feedback anxiety negatively moderated self-efficacy, which in turn seriously affected feedback effectiveness. Both high- and low-anxiety learners improved their pronunciation with the two CF types, and there were some indications that low-anxiety learners benefited more. Foreign language anxiety can play a role in the effectiveness of oral CF directed at phonological targets (Luquin., & Roothoof., 2019). Teachers' written and verbal CF reduces academic anxiety and improves learners' attitudes toward learning which can increase efficiency, effort, and self-confidence and provide the ground for promoting academic performance. Similarly, anxiety and attitude also influence the effectiveness of feedback to some extent (Patra et al., 2022). However, it is worth noting that anxiety may diminish the effect of feedback, but the negative effects of anxiety can be moderated by different types of feedback (Fu & Li, 2023). That is, using the right type of feedback can minimize the negative effects of anxiety and maximize the benefits of the study. While language anxiety mediated the effect of indirect WCF on L2 learning, it played little role in the extent to which learners benefited from direct WCF. In both oral and written contexts, output-pushing feedback might be less beneficial for anxious learners due to the more intense level of anxiety it is likely to induce (Shao et al., 2023). Anxious students welcome online foreign language oral tasks which can help them feel more confident and more willing to practice pronunciation so as to improve their communicative competencies (Martin, Alvarez, & Espasa, 2022).

However, there are some different findings. Wiboolyasarini et al. (2023) argued that high FLE groups benefit more from OCF techniques than low FLE groups, while high FLCA groups improved more after OCF than low FLCA groups, except for elicitation, recasting, and public feedback. Hussain, Saqlain, and Khadim (2023) found that the decrease in high levels of speaking anxiety and the increase in low levels of speaking anxiety display a positive impact on speaking practice and corrective feedback.

4. Conclusion

In summary, corrective feedback has received much attention in recent years. Most studies have found that the factors of corrective feedback are mainly divided into two sources, one is the external pedagogical differences, including the type of corrective feedback, the targets of corrective feedback, etc., and the other is the learners' individual differences, including the proficiency level and learners' emotions. However, some problems have been pointed out in the above studies. For instance, the implementation of some studies is still limited, and the different features of native language may lead to different results. These multiple and complicated factors still need to be explored extensively by scholars in the future.

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