

# Corrective Feedback in Language Learning

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## Abstract

In the language learning classroom, teachers always provide either positive evidence or negative evidence to learners in response to the learners' erroneous sentence (Kim, 2004). The negative evidence is also known as corrective feedback. This paper describes various types of corrective feedback provided to the learners when learning a second language (L2). We also discuss how corrective feedback facilitates language learning in five stages: notice, locate, perceive, uptake and repair. We argue that the nature of corrective feedback (explicit or implicit) has some effect how the feedback works in language learning.

## 1 Introduction

In the language learning classroom, teachers usually provide either positive evidence or negative evidence to learners in response to the learners' erroneous sentence (Kim, 2004). Positive evidence consists of samples of what is grammatical or acceptable in L2. Negative evidence is information about what is ungrammatical or unacceptable and it is often known as corrective feedback. A piece of corrective feedback is a response from an addressee to a speaker with an intention to correct the speaker's erroneous utterance.

Studies on corrective feedback have become a target for researchers who have focused on its nature and role in language teaching and learning (Panova and Lyster, 2002). Many studies have been conducted such as studies on patterns of the provision of corrective feedback and learn-

ers' uptake (see (Lyster and Ranta, 1997), (Panova and Lyster, 2002), and (Suzuki, 2004)), reviews on some theoretical and role issues of corrective feedback in L2 learning (refer (Kim, 2004) and (Tatawy, 2002)), research on learners' perception towards corrective feedback (see (Mackey, Gass and McDonough, 2000)) and investigation of the effectiveness of corrective feedback in various language learning environments (refer (Heift, 2004), (Ellis, Loewen and Erlam, 2006), (Loewen and Erlam, 2006) and (Ferreira, 2006)).

In the following, we start with further details about corrective feedback. We begin with what corrective feedback is as defined by Ellis et al. (2006). Later in the same section, types of corrective feedback together with samples interaction are described. The distinction between explicit corrective feedback and implicit corrective feedback is given in Section 3. Then Section 4 describes how corrective feedback facilitates the learners' progress in language learning in the stages of noticing, locating, perceiving, uptaking and repairing. We will subsequently link these stages to the classification of corrective feedback. Lastly concluding remarks will follow in Section 5.

## 2 Types of Corrective Feedback

Generally, a piece of corrective feedback is a response from an addressee to a speaker with an intention to correct the speaker's erroneous utterance. The incorrect utterance can consist of grammatical errors, meaning errors or inappropriate use of lexical items. In the context of a language learning environment, the addressee is a teacher or a tutor and the speaker is a student or a learner. Ac-

According to Ellis et al. (2006), the corrective feedback is provided in one or combination of the following forms: an indication of the location of the error, provision of the correct structure of the incorrect utterance, and provision of metalinguistic information which describes the nature of the error.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) have done an observational study on corrective feedback used by four teachers in four French immersion classrooms at primary level schools in Canada. According to them, there are six different types of corrective feedback supplied by those teachers: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, meta-linguistic feedback, elicitation and repetition. In addition, there are two more types of feedback: translations (as claimed by Panova and Lyster (2002)) and paralinguistic signs (see (Ellis, 2007)). Therefore we classify eight types of corrective feedback as discussed below.

An **explicit correction** is the teacher's feedback in which she or he explicitly corrects the student's erroneous utterance by providing the correct form of the utterance. For example:

- (1) Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.  
Teacher: No! You should say "I went to a zoo last Sunday."

When the teacher reformulates the student's utterance wholly or partly in a correct form, it is called **recast**. For example:

- (2) Teacher: What is the baby doing?  
Student: The baby is cry.  
Teacher: Yes, the baby is crying.

The third type of feedback which is **clarification request**, refers to the teacher's feedback to indicate that the teacher does not understand the student's utterance or the utterance is partly ill-formed. Therefore the student is requested to reformulate or repeat his or her utterance (Spada and Fröhlich (1995) as cited in Lyster and Ranta (1997)). Examples of such feedback phrases are "I don't understand.", "Pardon me!" or "Could you repeat?" The sample of conversation which contains such feedback is illustrated below:

- (3) Student: Sunday I see movie.  
Teacher: Could you repeat?

A **metalinguistic feedback** is an explanation of any errors that occurred in the student's erroneous utterance without providing the correct answer. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), this feedback can be either in the form of comments, information, or questions. Metalinguistic comments denote that there is an error or there are errors occurring in the student's utterance, for instance:

- (4) Student: John buy some fruits.  
Teacher: No, not buy.

Metalinguistic information can be given either as a grammatical description of the ill-formed utterance or a definition of a word if there is a lexical error. An example of metalinguistic feedback which provided the grammatical information is as follows:

- (5) Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.  
Teacher: Use past tense.

A metalinguistic question is similar to metalinguistic information, but instead of providing the information, the teacher tries to elicit it from the student. For example:

- (6) Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.  
Teacher: Past tense?

An **elicitation feedback** is the fifth type where the teacher can apply at least three methods in order to get the right utterance from the student. The first technique is by asking the student to complete the teacher's partly utterance as shown below.

- (7) Student: Tomorrow I bring the book.  
Teacher: No, tomorrow I .....

In the second elicitation technique, the teacher asks questions to the student in order to elicit correct utterance from the student, for instance:

- (8) Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.  
Teacher: How do we say 'go' in past tense?

The third technique is used when the teacher requests the student to reformulate her or his initial utterance. Here is one such instance:

- (9) Student: I goed to a zoo last Sunday.  
Teacher: goed?

A **repetition feedback** is the sixth type of feedback. The teacher repeats her or his student's incorrect utterance and raises her or his voice to highlight the error in the utterance. An example can be as follows:

- (10) Teacher: What is the baby doing?  
Student: The baby is cry.  
Teacher: The baby is *cry*? [Italic font shows the increase of the teacher's voice]

A **translation** feedback is used to interpret the learner's unsought uses of her or his native language (L1) into the target language. This feedback is relatively similar to recast and explicit correction where the teacher provides the correct version of the student's L1 utterance. Here the student's L1 utterance may be a grammatical or ungrammatical form. Due to the student's difficulty to produce the target language, alternatively he or she responds in L1 form. For instance:

- (11) Teacher: Where did you go last Sunday?  
Student: I. Saya pergi zoo. (in L1)  
Teacher: You went to a zoo? (L2 translation)

A **paralinguistic sign** is non-verbal corrective feedback where the teacher displays facial expression, produces gesture cues or raises her or his voice intonation in response to the student's erroneous utterance. For example:

- (12) Student: I go to a zoo yesterday.  
Teacher: [show a signal such as pointing her or his thumb at the back as an indicator to use past tense]

### 3 Explicit and Implicit Corrective Feedback

Long (1996) and Ellis et al. (2006) have proposed that corrective feedback is either in explicit or implicit form. Explicit corrective feedback tells overtly that an error has occurred whereas the implicit feedback does not. Ellis et al. (2006) says the explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback are explicit corrective feedback. Another explicit form of corrective feedback is elicitation feedback (Ellis, 2007). However, there is a contrasting claim for elicitation feedback. While Ellis is claiming it is an explicit form, Kim (2004) claims the elicitation corrective

feedback is of implicit type instead. By referring to the three techniques used in the elicitation feedback, the first and second techniques tend to be of explicit form. On the other hand, the last technique is more like the clarification request feedback which is of implicit type. Therefore, we classify the elicitation feedback as the explicit form following Ellis's claim.

As suggested by Long (1996), the implicit feedback types are recasts, confirmation checks, clarification requests, repetition and paralinguistic signs. Yet, Ellis et al. (2006) and Lyster and Ranta (1997) agree that recast is implicit corrective feedback, as agreed by Long. Translation is also considered as an implicit corrective feedback as the teacher translates his or her student's L1 utterance into the correct L2 target form. Table 1 below depicts the summary of the nature of corrective feedback.

## 4 How Corrective Feedback Can Assist in Language Learning

Results from second language acquisition (SLA) studies have shown that corrective feedback is beneficial to language learning. This section explains how corrective feedback helps students' progress during L2 learning in five stages of noticing, locating, perceiving, uptaking and repairing. All examples of dialogue which have been given in Section 2 will be referred to in the following subsections.

### 4.1 Noticing

The provision of corrective feedback makes the learners *notice* errors in their utterance. All examples previously given in Section 2 make the students either directly or indirectly notice the errors they have made. The nature of corrective feedback provided affects how the learners notice their erroneous utterance. Explicit corrective feedback directly draws the learners' attention to their error as shown in dialogue (1) and (4) - (9). In contrast, implicit corrective feedback indirectly brings attention by inducing the learners to detect a gap between their interlanguage and target language (Kim, 2004). The examples are in (2), (3), (10) and (12).

Theoretically, the noticing condition is parallel with the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1995), the Interac-

Categories	Types
<b>Explicit</b>	Explicit Correction Metalinguistic Feedback Elicitation Feedback
<b>Implicit</b>	Recast Repetition Feedback Clarification Request Translation Paralinguistic Sign

Table 1: Nature of corrective feedback

tion Hypothesis (Long, 1996) and the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 2005). Schmidt argues that noticing is requisite for learning, with a condition that the learners must consciously pay attention to the corrective feedback provided. In the Output Hypothesis, Swain highlights one of three functions of output about the noticing or triggering function (for more details, see (Swain, 2005) page 474-476). The corrective feedback given in (3) requires the learner to rephrase his or her initial utterance. The student figures out what is wrong with her or his initial utterance and tries to produce a better utterance. This situation is believed to facilitate the student's L2 development. Other L2 learning progress may happen with the feedback provided in (1) and (2). Both forms of feedback provide the correct utterance and this may stimulate the learner to notice the disparity between her or his initial utterance and the target language. Long (1996) in his Interaction Hypothesis, also claims corrective feedback obtained during "negotiation of meaning" may facilitate L2 development. Meaning negotiation is a situation when conversation between a non-native speaker and a native speaker breaks down. Both speakers are trying to solve the problem by accomplishing a variety of conversational strategies such as clarification requests, and recasts. Such a situation provides not only direct and indirect information about what is grammatical but also additional positive evidence which may otherwise be absent in the learner's utterance. After noticing the error, the learner may be able to locate, perceive, uptake and repair the error occurred.

## 4.2 Locating

Corrective feedback also helps the students in *locating* the committed error in their non-target-like utterance. When the students know exactly where the error is located, it is easier for them to react in order to correct the error. Corrective feedback either obviously locates or unclearly highlights the error place. The former can be accomplished by pointing directly to the particular location of the error while the later by giving a hint to the learners to locate the error place themselves. Such hints can be delivered by providing further information about the cause of the error such as grammar rules, or by giving gesture signals or facial expressions.

Of all corrective feedback examples given in Section 2, the feedback in (1), (4) and (7)-(10) clearly and directly locates the error place in the learner's ill-formed utterance. Therefore the learner knows easily the error place and he or she is able to focus on and repair that error. On the other hand, the feedback given in (3), (5), (6) and (12) supply a clue about the place of the error. Such signals will let the student think and figures out the location where the error occurred. This situation induces the learner to carry out the cognitive comparison between the error and the target form which is believed to facilitate L2 learning.

## 4.3 Perceiving

Students *perceive* corrective feedback as an indicator that something is wrong in their utterance. If the teacher responds to the learner's non-target-like utterance with feedback that there is a grammatical error in the utter-

ance, and the student perceives the feedback as the response to her or his grammatical mistake in the utterance, then the feedback is successfully understood by and conveyed to the student. When the teacher's feedback intention and the student's perception match, the student knows the cause of the error and it is easier for the learner to correct the error.

Some corrective feedback is easy to perceive as morphosyntactic, phonological, semantic (meaning) and lexical error feedback. For example, the provision of feedback in (1), (5), (6) and (8) are easier to be perceived as morphosyntactic error feedback by the student. The learner is aware of what types of mistake he or she has made in the utterance. However, it is quite difficult to perceive the feedback provided in (2) and (3) as a corrective feedback to the student's incorrect usage of a grammar rule.

A study has been done to investigate how learners perceive feedback provided to them ((Mackey et al., 2000)). The study is to find out whether the corrective feedback provided is perceived by the learners as a response to erroneous utterances, and to investigate whether the students' perceptions are parallel to the teacher's intention with respect to feedback on grammatical error, phonological error, semantic error and lexical error. The results show that recast feedback with an intention to correct a grammar error is always perceived (by students) as a response to correct meaning or semantic error. Lyster and Ranta (1997) also claim, with the provision of recast feedback that the students confuse whether the teacher's intention is to correct a form or a meaning error.

#### 4.4 Uptaking

A response from the student immediately after the provision of corrective feedback is called *uptake*. Lyster and Ranta (1997) define an uptake, in the context of error followed by corrective feedback responses, as "a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance"(p. 49).

Some pieces of corrective feedback require uptake from the learners, while some do not. Much research has been conducted to examine which corrective feedback leads to more learners' uptake. The results from the research done

by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Suzuki (2004) yield that elicitation feedback is the feedback that leads to the student's uptake the most. Clarification requests and metalinguistic feedback become the second and third most effective in promoting students' uptake. Heift (2004) also claims more uptake from the students when they are given metalinguistic and repetition feedback. Yet, feedback as in (3) - (9) leads to immediate learner's response to the feedback. In contrast, feedback such as recasts, explicit correction and translation becomes the least likely to uptake or may result in no uptake. This is because the correct form is provided to the students. As Heift mentions in her paper, when the right utterance is given to the students, uptake is unnecessary.

Again, in the observational study done by Lyster and Ranta, the students do two types of uptake. The first one is an uptake which results in the correct form given by the student, while the other one is an uptake that still provides the incorrect form in response to the corrective feedback. These two uptake responses are also known as *repair* which will be elaborated in the following subsection.

#### 4.5 Repairing

A repair from the student which results in the correct form is known as *successful repair* and a repair which still produces an ill-formed utterance is called *needs-repair*. Lyster and Ranta (1997) classify the successful repair responses in four types: self-repair, peer-repair, repetition and incorporation.

Repetition is a repair action when the student repeats the teacher's correct form. Yet, incorporation is referred to "a student's repetition of the correct form provided by the teacher, which is then incorporated into a longer utterance produced by the student" (p. 50). Repetition and incorporation usually follow after the provision of recast, explicit correction, or translation, which can be repeated or incorporated in a longer utterance. For instance the interaction in (1), (2) and (11), the student may reiterate the teacher's exact utterance only or incorporate it in a longer utterance as shown in (13) below.

- (13) Student: I go to a zoo last Sunday.  
Teacher: No! You should say "I went to a zoo last Sunday." (*explicit correction*)

Student: Yes, I went to a zoo last Sunday with my parents. I saw ..... (**repair-incorporation**)

Self-repair means the students themselves fix their non-target-like utterance. This situation occurs when the teacher provides feedback which does not produce the right utterance and the feedback prompts the students to respond. The forms of corrective feedback which promote the students to repair their error themselves are clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition and paralinguistic cues as all shown in example (3) - (10) and (12). The examples of error-feedback-repair sequences are demonstrated in (14) and (15) below.

- (14) Student: Sunday I see movie.  
Teacher: Could you repeat? (*clarification request*)  
Student: Hmmmm... I saw a movie.... (**self-repair**)
- (15) Student: John buy some fruits.  
Teacher: No, not buy. (*metalinguistic*)  
Student: Sorry! Bought! (**self-repair**)

Peer-repair is provided by the student who is not the one who produces the erroneous utterance. In the language learning classroom, the student could be the friend of the student who made the mistake. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), the peer-repair sequences is initiated by giving the same corrective feedback which promotes the self-repair sequences. Here is such an instance in (16).

- (16) Student1: I go to a zoo last Sunday.  
Teacher: How do we say 'go' in past tense? (*elicitation*)  
Student2: We say went, teacher! (**peer-repair**)

When the student fixes her or his erroneous utterance but it is still incorrect, the repair move is called needs-repair. Lyster and Ranta (1997) sub-categorise this into acknowledgement, same error, different error, off-target, hesitation, and partial repair (further details, refer to (Lyster and Ranta, 1997) and (Suzuki, 2004)). The dialogue in (17) below demonstrates the needs-repair sequence.

- (17) Student: Tomorrow I bring the book.  
Teacher: No, tomorrow I ..... (*elicitation*)  
Student: Aaaah... I bringed the book! (**needs-repair**)

## 5 Conclusions

Many results from observational and experimental research have shown that corrective feedback helps in language learning. However, as Havranek and Cesnik (2001) (as cited in (Heift, 2004)) have said "the success of corrective feedback is affected by its format, the type of error, and certain learner characteristics such as verbal intelligence, level of proficiency, and the learner's attitude toward correction". We agree that the format of corrective feedback provided contributes to some degree to how L2 learning takes place. The explicitness and implicitness of corrective feedback influences how learners notice, locate, perceive, uptake and repair their errors. Learners have to first notice the error they committed after the provision of the corrective feedback. When they become aware that the error occurred, they will figure out the location of the error, understand what is the cause of the error, and correct the error.

Explicit corrective feedback as it is defined, explicitly tells that an error has occurred. Explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback and elicitation feedback immediately gives a notice to the learners that their utterance is incorrect. As for other stages, elicitation feedback followed by metalinguistic feedback helps the learners to easily find their error location, perceive the feedback as a corrective response to their error, and react to repair the error. However, as the right utterance is given in the explicit feedback, the students are not required to uptake and repair their error.

Since implicit feedback indirectly tells that an error has occurred, learners may or may not notice their ill-formed utterance, especially when recast feedback is provided. If learners compare or juxtapose their non-target-like utterance with their teacher's correct form they will find the dissimilarity between both utterances, then they notice, know the error place, perceive the feedback as a correct form of their non-target-like utterance and repeat the correct form as a repair action.

With the provision of repetition feedback, learners notice and know exactly where the error is as the teacher raises her or his voice to highlight the error. As such, the learners focus on and repair that particular highlighted word. Yet, when the teacher translates the learners' L1 utterance into correct L2 language, the learners may reiterate the target utterance (self-repair). In a different sit-

uation, the learners have to figure out what errors they have made when the teacher requests them to clarify or reformulate their initial utterance, or gives paralinguistic signs such as shaking head, rolling eyes or some gesture cues. In the worst situation, the learners may make other mistakes when trying to correct their initial ill-formed utterance.

In conclusion, we argue that corrective feedback does have a significant contribution in L2 learning. However, its explicitness and implicitness affects how well learners may notice their error before they may locate, perceive, uptake and repair the error.

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