



外语·文化·教学论丛

Corrective Feedback
in Second Language Writing

英语写作教学中的反馈研究

朱 晔 著

by Ye ZHU



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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英语写作教学中的反馈研究 = Corrective Feedback in
Second Language Writing / 朱晔著. —杭州: 浙江大学
出版社, 2007.9

(外语·文化·教学论丛)

ISBN 978-7-308-05579-6

I. 英… II. 朱… III. 英语—写作—教学研究—高等学
校 IV. H315

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2007)第 147859 号

责任编辑 张颖琪

封面设计 刘依群

出版发行 浙江大学出版社

(杭州天目山路 148 号 邮政编码 310028)

(E-mail: zupress@mail.hz.zj.cn)

(网址: <http://www.zjupress.com>)

排 版 浙江大学出版社电脑排版中心

印 刷 德清县第二印刷厂

开 本 787mm×960mm 1/16

印 张 10.75

字 数 279 千

版 印 次 2007 年 9 月第 1 版 2007 年 9 月第 1 次印刷

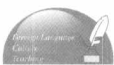
书 号 ISBN 978-7-308-05579-6

定 价 20.00 元

序 言

第二语言习得是应用语言学领域内一个新兴的跨领域学科，它一方面汲取了来自理论语言学、心理语言学、教育学和认知科学的理论营养，另一方面又与语言教学的具体实践密切相关，并主要关注环境、认知、心理、情感及社会等多方因素在第二语言及外语学习过程中所发挥的作用，以及它们对于语言学习最终成果的影响。第二语言习得研究在国外已经蓬勃发展了二十多年，国内的研究更是方兴未艾。一系列的研究成果不仅有助于我们进一步了解语言学习的复杂过程、内在机制以及中介语的性质，也为课堂教学提供了难能可贵的参考意见。

朱晔博士的此项研究是关于第二语言习得领域内一度备受争议的课题——教师反馈，特别是针对错误形式的纠正性反馈在语言学习过程中的效果。在教学上，纠正性反馈是语言学习过程中一个至关重要的环节，它是语言学习者获取语言信息、反思自身语言知识体系，并进一步促进语言产出的重要途径。然而直至目前，纠正性反馈的内在机制和具体效果仍处于“问题多于答案”的探讨阶段。20世纪80年代不少研究者曾经质疑甚至否定纠正性反馈对于语言习得的积极价值。近几年来理论界与教育界对二语习得过程和二语学习者的认识不断深入，特别是20世纪90年代以来，认知心理学的发展为二语习得研究提供了一个全新的理论视角和研究框架，使人们意识到各种认知因素，特别是注意力资源，在语言习得过程中发挥了不可忽视的作用。正是基于这个前提，纠正性反馈的价值得到了重新的认识与研究，成为语



言学习研究的热点, 角度各异的实证性研究更是层出不穷。目前大量的研究发现表明, 纠正性反馈作为一种常用的教学手段, 可以有效地引导、提升和强化学习者对目标语言形式的认知投入, 从而对学习成果产生积极长效的影响。该研究正是在这样的背景下开展的。

朱晔博士的研究选择了大学英语教学课堂内的书面反馈作为研究对象, 通过精心设计的任务形式, 在定性和定量两个层次上分析了学习者处理书面反馈过程中的语言表现和认知过程, 着重考察了反馈形式、目标结构(定语从句)和任务类型这三个变量的不同效果及交互作用, 并较为深入地探讨了学习者处理书面纠正性反馈的认知机制与心理过程。总体而言, 这项研究圆满地解决了预定的研究问题, 并对后续研究和课堂教学都提出了富有启发性的建议。

应惠兰

2007年9月8日

自序

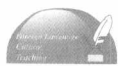
此书是在我的博士论文基础上修改完成的。在广东外语外贸大学外国语言学与应用语言学研究センター攻读博士学位的那几年令我终生受益，也终生难忘。从修习课程、选题论证、撰写开题报告、实验设计和预测，到后期的数据分析、论文撰写、反复修改和最终答辩，每一步都是对我个人理论水平与科研能力的重大考验。在这漫长而艰辛的过程中，我的导师王初明教授给了我热忱的鼓励、最及时的建议和最中肯的意见，帮助我一步步地走完每一个重要环节，顺利地整个研究任务。我还要衷心地感谢浙江大学外国语言文化与国际交流学院的何莲珍教授和应惠兰教授。何莲珍教授在实验环节和论文撰写阶段给予我许多支持与帮助，应惠兰教授也给了我极大的支持，并为此书作序。能够得到她们的肯定，对我而言意义重大。最后，我还要感谢研究中心的博士生同学们和浙江大学外国语言文化与国际交流学院的同事们，感谢他们对我的鼓励和帮助。学术研究是一条孤独而艰苦的漫漫长路，希望在他们的陪伴下，我可以在这条路上走得更远。

2007年7月于浙江大学

Abstract

Corrective feedback has been widely argued to play a role in second language (L2) development. Such arguments, however, remain largely speculative due to limited empirical evidence with regard to the nature of feedback and L2 learners' processing of it. This study is intended to investigate, from a cognitive-processing perspective, how L2 learners perceive and process feedback message addressing their written errors, and how feedback interacts, during feedback processing, with other factors such as target structures and task conditions to produce effects on L2 learning. Two empirical studies were conducted in parallel. In the first, a repeated-measures study, 81 Chinese college-level learners of English participated in a meaning-oriented error correction task and a form-oriented error correction task. In both tasks the errors involving 4 types of English relative clauses were addressed with 3 feedback forms, that is, whole-sentence underlining, specific marking of the error, and attached metalinguistic clues. The learners were also required to report on the explicitness value of each feedback message they received in the tasks. In the second, a qualitative study, 6 learners from a comparable population completed the same two tasks along with a concurrent think-aloud and an immediate retrospective recall.

Four major findings emerged from the studies. First, feedback forms did not affect feedback processing in a linear manner. Instead, the forms that specified the locus of errors promised the best task performance, whereas metalinguistic clues appeared redundant or even counter-effective to feedback processing. Second, the effects of target structure features (*i.e.*, linguistic and cognitive complexity) were dual-faceted in the sense that the learners' error-detection performance hinged on the perceptual salience of the structure, and their ultimate success in correction was largely determined by its inherent learning difficulty. Third, the learners' task performance and verbal reports in this research revealed a close connection between feedback explicitness and error detection. Finally, the learners' use of meta-cognitive strategies emerged as an internal factor strongly interacting with other factors, especially



the task condition.

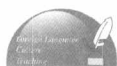
Overall, the findings suggest that L2 learners' feedback processing is primarily oriented to their detection, rather than ultimate correction, of the errors being addressed. This runs counter to the common practice in most language learning studies that measures feedback effect solely in terms of success in error correction. In turn, error detection hinges on the perceptual salience of the target structure, which is either internally determined by its linguistic features or externally enhanced by feedback message. This echoes Sharwood Smith's (1993) distinction between internally- and externally-derived input enhancement, and highlights the necessity to interpret feedback effect in relation to specific errors in question. Furthermore, the unexpected findings about the role of learner strategies offer an alternative explanation to the individual variation frequently observed in feedback studies, and calls for more attention to learner-internal factors in future studies on feedback processing.

List of Abbreviations

CF	Corrective Feedback
CFE	Corrective Feedback Episode
DEC	Discrete Error Correction
ECT	Error Correction Tasks
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ESL	English as Second Language
FES	Feedback Explicitness Survey
HN	Head Noun
L2	Second Language
M	Metalinguistic Clues
OP	Operating Principles
OPR	Object of the Preposition in Relative Clause
POS	Possessive Pronoun in Relative Clause
RC	Relative Clause
RP	Relative Pronoun
S	Specific Marking
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLW	Second Language Writing
SRT	Stimulated Recall Task
SUB	Subject of Relative Clause
TAT	Think-aloud Task
TEC	Text Error Correction
U	Whole-sentence Underlining
URC	Unrestricted Relative Clause

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Chapter 1

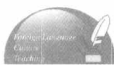
Introduction

1.1 Research Orientation

This study explores the online processing of written corrective feedback (CF) by Chinese college-level learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in classroom settings. This is an attempt to describe EFL learners' linguistic and cognitive behaviors triggered by their exposure to written CF addressing the language errors in their written output, and to reveal the separate and interactive effects of the internal and external factors which are now believed to mediate feedback processing. Such an attempt is in line with the general commitment of studies in second language acquisition (SLA) to unveil the linguistic and behavioral patterns that learners manifest as a result of the interaction between their internal knowledge system and the external language environment, such as the instructional treatments and task conditions, in language learning processes.

1.2 CF: the Target of Research

This study targets written CF delivered in Chinese EFL classrooms. While most SLA studies focus on oral CF occurring in communicative classroom activities, written CF is largely handled as a pedagogical issue in the field of second language writing (SLW). Given the split in research perspectives, this study is unique in two aspects. On the one hand, it attempts to accommodate written CF into the cognitive-processing framework of SLA, thus reinterpreting the previous pedagogical findings with better SLA-informed notions. On the other hand, by probing into the feedback issue in a different mode, findings obtained in this study will shed new light on the present discussion on the mechanisms and functioning of CF in SLA settings. Taken together, this study seeks to incorporate theoretical arguments and empirical findings in both SLA and SLW studies by unifying various accounts of CF from different perspectives.



Different terms have been adopted to capture the varied cases of classroom CF treatment. Pedagogical studies opt for terms like “error correction” (Hendrickson, 1978; Chaudron, 1988), “teachers marking” (Radecki & Swales, 1988), and “grammar correction” (Truscott, 1996). Recent studies in the interactionalist line of SLA prefer the notion of “interactional feedback” (Long & Robinson, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Linguists of first and second language acquisition, on the other hand, tend to use the notion of “negative feedback” or even “negative evidence” to highlight the linguistic data available in CF.

I choose the term *corrective feedback* to cover the research subject of the present thesis because, first of all, it captures the potential corrective effect of feedback on learners’ output, and at the same time acknowledges that the responsibility of the actual correction of errors ultimately lies with learners themselves. What is more, the term feedback, indicating the response to the previous language output, is general enough to cover the varied and subtle delivering of CF treatment in language classrooms. In fact, CF is adopted in almost every language classroom, and allows a great variety in terms of channels, forms, explicitness, as well as ultimate effectiveness. Such diversity in nature is best exemplified in the following two CF episodes (CFEs):

CFE 1

Setting: Teacher-learner classroom interaction

Learner: *And I saw many bird in the woods.*

Teacher: *Many birds?*

Learner: *Many bird, yes, many.*

CFE 2

Setting: Teacher’s marking on a student’s composition

There are many people want to see the huge monster

CFE 1 contains a case of oral CF occurring in classroom interactions with a focus on the missing plural morpheme *-s* of the noun phrase “birds”, and the teacher was careful enough not to intrude the ongoing interaction by using a very indirect form of CF, namely *recast*¹. The student, however, failed to

¹ Recast is defined by Long (in press, p. 2) as “a reformulation of all or part of a learner’s immediately preceding utterance in which one or more non-target like (lexical, grammatical, etc.) items are replaced by the corresponding target language form(s), and where, throughout the exchange, the focus of the interlocutors is on *meaning* not language as an object”.

interpret the recast as it was intended, and mistook it as a routine interactive move of comprehension check with a purpose of meaning negotiation, thus rendering the CF nearly ineffective. In contrast, the written CF in CFE 2 is self-evident in terms of the teacher's intention to correct, and there was little chance that the student would fail to understand the CF as it was intended. Besides, the teacher in CFE 2 just highlighted the syntactic error by circling it without further clues or models, and left it with the student to figure out what was wrong with the two words "there are" and to find out what the correct form should be. The best case would be that the student realized that the circled words were superfluous and deleted it immediately. Or, it is also highly possible that the student would still fail to understand the meaning of the teacher and kept wondering whether the problem lay in the tense form ("there were" instead of "there are") or else.

The above two CFEs clearly manifest the complexity of the CF issue in language learning research. First of all, CF can be realized in various forms, and the actual delivering of different forms of CF will definitely affect its ultimate effect. What we are not sure is to what extent the different forms of CF vary in their effects, and whether there exists an "optimal" form of CF which might serve as the "best cure" for learner errors. Second, CF can target virtually every aspect of language use, ranging from phonological and orthographic errors to higher-level errors in sentence structure or paragraph organization. The question is whether all errors are created equal with regard to the CF effect. Third, the mismatch prevails between the feedback message that the teacher intends to send and the student's interpretation of the message. Sometimes, as in CFE 1, the teacher's corrective intention is totally neglected due to the ambiguity of the feedback (*e.g.*, recasts). In some other cases, as in CFE 2, the student can accurately interpret the teacher's intention but still fails to understand the feedback message and use it in subsequent language modification. What we need to know is to what extent such mismatches affect the functioning of CF, and what other factors may play a role in learners' dealing with CF. All these questions constitute a strong impetus to the present research on written CF.

1.3 Rationale for the Study

Theoretical pendulum has swung back and forth with regard to the status of CF in language learning processes. While nativists argued against any substantial role of CF in acquisition processes, current language learning researchers and practitioners have reached a consensus on the value of CF in triggering selective attention to the discrepancy between target norm and the