

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices on Corrective Feedback

教师纠错性反馈的理念与实践

陈华 / 著



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作 者	陈 华 著
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Introduction

The motivation of this thesis stems from the interest in two research issues: corrective feedback and the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices.

It's believed that teacher-student interaction provides learners with the best opportunities to practice target language skills, test the hypotheses about the target language, and get the useful feedback. Therefore, studies of L2 classroom interaction have attracted much attention in SLA studies since 1980s. Corrective feedback in L2 classrooms lies at the core of research on teacher-student and student-student interaction (Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Long, 1996).

The general agreement is that corrective feedback is important to learners' achievements. The issue of which corrective feedback techniques are most effective, however, is still in debate. Proponents of implicit corrective techniques (Doughty, 2001; Long, 1996) claim that recasts (i.e., teacher's correct reformulation of an erroneous utterance) are effective in getting learners to notice and focus on the form and meaning of the error without breaking the communicative flow. Recent research, however, suggests that recasts often carry ambiguous connotations, where fluency takes a front seat to accuracy. As a result, recasts go unnoticed by learners (Havranek, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Lyster (1998a) advocates the use of other corrective feedback techniques, namely "negotiation of form" (detailed in Chapter 2), which

promotes noticing and leads to self-correction by the learner. Regardless of which position one takes, the difficulty is that an average language teacher is seldom exposed to these different corrective feedback practices or taught on how to effectively implement them in their classrooms. Such questions as “Should learners’ errors be corrected?”, “When learners’ errors should be corrected?”, “Which errors should be corrected?”, “How should errors be corrected?” and “Who should do the correcting?” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997: 38) have long confused the teachers. Yet, somehow, teachers deal with their learners’ errors in the classroom in one way or another, whether or not the strategies they use conform to what the research literature suggests they should do.

The interest of teachers’ beliefs has also spread into the field of SLA (S. Borg, 2003; Richards, 1998). The focus of early research on teachers’ beliefs have largely been on the general pedagogical beliefs (Johnson, 1992), covering the areas of reading and literacy (Fang, 1996). The common conclusion is that teachers’ beliefs influence teachers’ in-class behaviors (Johnson, 1994). Narrowing down the scope of research on teachers’ beliefs and practices to a specific area will make it possible to see if there is a match between their beliefs and classroom behaviors. Several scholars have recently reflected on this need for limited scope in their research designs (S Borg, 1998; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004). However, to date, there has been little investigation into language teachers’ beliefs about corrective feedback in EFL contexts. The origination and development of the two fields will be reviewed in Chapter 1, together with observational and explorative studies carried out in the language instructional contexts.

Taking both of these interesting issues into account, this thesis investigate the relationships between EFL teachers’ beliefs on corrective feedback and their instructional practices by observing and recording

four teachers teaching college English in Chinese EFL context. Chapter 2 provides the detailed description of methodology adopted in this study, including the research site, the participants, data collection, coding scheme and the data analysis. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 the results of this study is presented and discussed. The conclusion drawn from the present study, also the implication and the suggestion for the future work will be provided.

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Chapter 1 Literature Review

1.1 Corrective Feedback and L2 Acquisition

The role of corrective feedback in SLA (second language acquisition) has a long history and scholars today remain divided. Theoretical motivation of corrective feedback comes from the interest in the type of input. Earlier research on corrective feedback appeared in 1970s, which attached importance to the description of error treatment (Chaudron, 1988, cited in Kartchava, 2006). As far as behaviorists are concerned, language learning is a process of habit formation and errors are to be avoided at all. Second language teachers are to provide immediate and explicit error correction when learners make errors. It is believed that teachers should correct every error committed by students (Schulz, 1996). The general assumption is that corrective feedback is frequent, but is arbitrary, ambiguous, and unsystematic (Long, 1977, cited in Han, 2001).

Those who agree with the nativist explanation hold that positive evidence alone is sufficient for learners to acquire a second language. For nativist, second language learning can be achieved in much the same way as first language acquisition and student errors are thought of as an incidental result of the second language learning process and are therefore inevitable.

Beliefs about corrective feedback began to change in 1980s. Interactionists claim that language learning is achieved through interaction (Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1990). For them, a desirable type of interaction

is known as negotiation of meaning. Schmidt (1990) argues that noticing, which calls for a conscious apprehension and awareness of input, is central to SLA. According to his “noticing hypothesis”, awareness at the level of noticing is a necessary condition for converting input to intake. Long (1996) asserts that another way to learn a language is through the provision of implicit negative feedback (recasts), and that the negative feedback (error correction) obtained during negotiation work may be facilitative of L2 development. Mackey and Philp (1998) suggest that interaction with negotiation and intensive recasts may be more effective than interaction with negotiation alone in facilitating the development of advanced question forms. Those working within the interactionists' paradigm think of positive evidence as insufficient and propose a role for both positive and negative evidence. It has been proved that students in L2 classrooms, “teacher-students interaction provides propitious opportunities for reactive focus on form that targets students' nontarget output” (Lyster & Mori, 2006: 270).

However, both positive and negative evidence are claimed to be necessary for SLA (Long, 1996). Positive evidence is the input that provides language learners the correct and native-like examples. According to Long, positive evidence can be provided as either authentic input, like that which occurs in naturalistic conversations, or as modified input like that which occurs in foreigner talk discourse. In contrast, negative evidence refers to “information available to the learner as to what is not possible in the L2” (Long, 2007: 76). It can take many forms, from pre-emptive correction (e.g., explicit explanation of grammar rules) to reactive correction (e.g., implicit recasts). Negative feedback is a subset of negative evidence, which refers to information learners receive that something they said was ungrammatical. Brown (2000: 217) argues that “inevitably learners will make mistakes in the

process of acquisition and that process will be impeded if they do not commit errors and then benefit from various form of feedback on those errors". However, in order to make students notice the errors, but without acquiring them, it is necessary to provide negative evaluation (Sharwood Smith, 1991), that is what is called corrective feedback. Corrective feedback takes the form of responses to learner utterances containing an error. Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006) conclude four possible responses of corrective feedback in classroom. First, it may be an indication that an error is committed. Second, it may be the provision that the target language should be. Third, it may be the provision of metalinguistic knowledge about the error. Last, it could be any combination of the above three responses.

At the same time, some people think that corrective feedback may harm the student and would prevent them to acquire language because of stress and anxiety (Krashen, 1985, cited in Miller, 2003). In contrast with such claim, a point worth considering is the attitude of language learners toward corrective feedback. Schulz (2001) conducts a study and finds that students need focus on form and explicit correction. It is a surprise that most students believe correction is teachers' responsibility. This study indicates that corrective feedback does not discourage students, but rather gives them the information that they desire. Later, Jang (2003) conducts a survey with Korean college level EFL learners in order to investigate the relationships between learners' anxiety and corrective feedback. The survey reveals average levels of foreign language anxiety among the learners in general, but the increased levels of anxiety could lead to the negative attitudes toward corrective feedback. What's more important is Jang finds significant relationships between learners' anxiety and proficiency levels. That is, as the learners' proficiency level increase, their anxiety levels decrease. Therefore, in that

study, college level students have a lower anxiety levels toward corrective feedback than beginning or intermediate learners have.

Corrective feedback can be classified as explicit correction, recasts and prompts (Lyster & Mori, 2006) known as interactional feedback. Prompts include a variety of signals that push learners to self-repair. This term has been also used as negotiation of form (Lyster, 1998b; Lyster & Ranta, 1997) or form-focus negotiation (Lyster, 2002). In fact, Lyster's work contains several conceptual confusions: such as, "focus on form" (e.g., Long & Robinson, 1998) is equated with "negative feedback", "form focused instruction" with "analytic language teaching" and "recasts" with "paraphrase". In this study, the study uses the terms, explicit corrective, negotiation of form and recasts as feedback strategies in order to compare with the previous studies easily.

Corrective feedback differs in terms of how explicit or implicit it is. For implicit corrective feedback, there is no overt indicator that an error has been committed, and for explicit corrective feedback, there is overt indicator (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006). Explicit corrective feedback is the indicator that what the learners said was incorrect, and often along with what the correct utterance should be (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), and likely to impede the flow of communication. As a result, it could promote explicit language learning (Ellis et al., 2006).

Of all the many ways corrective feedback is delivered, implicit corrective feedback in the form of recasts or corrective recasts seems particularly promising (Lyster, 1998a, 1998b, 2004; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Nabei, 2002; Nicholas, Lightbown & Spada, 2001; Sheen, 2006; Takao Egi, 2005). Recast has been defined as "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error" (Lyster & Ranta, 1997: 46). The narrowing of this definition can be found in Long (2007), in which Long emphasizes the context of recast. That is,

the focus of the interlocutors must be on meaning, not language as object. That is to say, the correction in recasts is implicit and incidental. Whereas Lyster (1998a) shows that the function of recasts can often be ambiguous, the understanding of recasts is still controversial. Hauser (2005), Sheen (2006) and Long provide review of the research on recasts. In general, the recasts studies demonstrate that implicit corrective feedback of this kind can have a beneficial effect on acquisition.

For Long (1996) recasts have several potential advantages. Recasts could convey information about the target language in context. As long as learners have comprehension about the message, the form - function mapping could be developed. Then students could be motivated to notice the new linguistic information in the input. Finally, recasts on learners' output mean that both the incorrect and correct utterances are juxtaposed. This allows students to compare the correct and incorrect forms. Based on this results, Doughty (2001:252) argues that recasts build the ideal means to reach an "immediately contingent focus on form".

Descriptive studies have shown that recasts exist, at least in French immersion classrooms (Lyster, 1998a, 1998b), ESL (teach English as a second language) classrooms (Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2001; Oliver, 2000) and EFL classrooms (Lochtman, 2002; Sheen, 2004). Lyster and Ranta (1997), Oliver (2000) and Seedhouse (1997) suggest that recasts are by far the most frequent form of corrective feedback in classrooms. However, the effectiveness of recasts can not be obtained from descriptive work alone, because the absence of pretests and the control group (Long, 2007). Lyster (1998b) has suggested that the function of recasts may sometimes be judged by "uptake". Uptake is defined by Lyster as students' reaction to the different types of feedback immediately after the provision of corrective feedback.

Yet the general accepted “uptake” has at least two problems. First, there are no data of effectiveness in Lyster’s (1998a, 1998b) or Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) research. All the data are descriptive without pretest or posttest. Second, immediate uptake is defined as incorporation of the input in the turn immediately after the provision of corrective feedback. However, Oliver’s (1995) study of negative feedback in the conversation between NSs (native speakers) and NNSs (non-native speakers) shows that NNSs only incorporated 10% of all recasts. Thus, immediate incorporation (uptake) is often impossible, because students may use other ways to react to the feedback they received. Ohta (2000, cited in Long, 2007) just find that learners’ private speech (oral language of students to themselves) frequently constitute what Lyster’s uptake. Whereas uptake is the only measure Lyster applies, how much truer is it outside of the immersion classroom, where the subjects matter is instructed by through the medium of L2? As documented by many studies (Lochtman, 2002; Truscott, 1999) in teacher-dominated classrooms teachers provide very few opportunities for output at all, let alone the immediate uptake. Long (2007: 99) concludes that it is problematic to expect the effect of any form of corrective feedback after immediate exposure to single token of a target form.

Though most studies have proved the high frequent use of recasts, it does not mean the results of these studies can be generalized. For example, Sheen (2004) finds that teachers’ corrective feedback must be different after comparing teachers’ corrective feedback in four communicative classroom settings (Canada ESL, New Zealand ESL, French immersion and Korean EFL). Oliver (1995, 2000) adds that the age of language learners does lead to different provision of corrective feedback. In another study carried out in Hong Kong, Tsang (2004) finds both recasts and explicit correction are the most frequent types of

corrective feedback, and states that recasts may give way to other types of feedback moves, such as negotiation of form, which may be more effective than recasts. Tsang explains that the difference between that study and Lyster and Ranta's (1997) is the kind of instruction under investigation. While Lyster and Ranta's are meaning-centered, Tsang's is the mixture of meaning-focused and form-focused instruction. The results are echoed by Lotchman (2002), who finds the dominant use instead of recasts in GFL (teach Germany as a foreign language) classrooms.

Giving these conflicting findings, and possible reasons, such as teaching settings, learners' age and instruction focus, some researchers (Lyster & Mori, 2006; Sheen, 2004) suggest that it seems worthwhile to investigate to what extent teachers' beliefs are likely to play a role in the provision of corrective feedback. Namely, how do teachers, the main roles of the corrective moves, view corrective feedback? What is their preference of corrective feedback strategies? In a word, what are their beliefs toward corrective feedback?

1.2 Teachers' Beliefs

Another field attracting increased interest is research on teachers' beliefs. According to Clark and Peterson (1986), the process of teaching involves two major domains: teachers' thought processes and teachers' action and their observable effects. Teachers' thought processes occur inside teachers' head and are unobservable. Traditional research on teachers' action and their observable effects examine how teacher behaviors influence students' achievement. Its major goal is to determine the criteria for excellence in teaching by estimating the effects of teachers' actions and their performance on student learning.

With the advent of cognitive psychology, researchers become increasingly interested in teachers' thinking. Since Jackson's (1968,

cited in Kartchava, 2006) first attempt in *Life in Classroom* to describe and understand the mental constructs and processes that underlie teacher behavior, the study of teacher cognition is receiving added attention in general in ESL/EFL field. The new line of research is purported to enhance our understanding of how and why the process of teaching looks and works the way it does (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

The first problem on the study of teachers' beliefs is the definition of "belief" (Johnson, 1994). Researchers invoke this term to refer to different things, including teachers thoughts during instruction, thoughts during lessons planning, beliefs about students and teaching, reflection about their own practices, and self-awareness of procedures they use to solve classroom problems (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Kagan, 1990; S. Borg, 2003). The conceptual ambiguity is just as what Clandinin and Connelly (1987, cited in S. Borg, 2003: 83) point out, "identical terms have been defined in different ways and different terms have been used to describe similar concepts". For example, Bell's (2005) "attitude" is what teachers believe stores of beliefs, knowledge, theories, assumptions and attitudes which play a significant role in shaping teachers' instructional decisions. S. Borg's (2003) cognition is unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think. In the present study, the term belief is defined as "statements teachers made about their ideas, thoughts, and knowledge that are expressed as evaluations of what should be done, should be the case, and is preferable" (Basturkmen, Loewen & Ellis, 2004: 244). Because teachers' beliefs are unobservable cognitive dimension, which are often held unconsciously, a second problematic aspect of teachers' beliefs is that it usually can only be uncovered indirectly (Pajares, 1992).

Despite these difficulties, there are still the increased interests in the research of teachers' beliefs in language teaching. Breen, Hird,