Interactionist Approach to Corrective Feedback

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Corrective feedback (CF) is a common technique for helping learners recognize errors in their second language (L2) production. It has also been the subject of much research over the past 30 years and has been approached from a wide variety of theoretical angles. One of these is the Interactionist approach, which posits that CF has the potential to draw learners' attention to problems in their L2 production, provide opportunities for modified output (i.e., to self-correct), and to hear models of targetlike input (Gass, 2003; Long, 1996).

More specifically, interactionist researchers believe that when learners receive CF during meaningful, communicative tasks or conversations, their attention can be brought to 'mismatches' between their own forms and the targetlike forms. This in turn may facilitate form-meaning mappings to a greater degree than if the CF was provided during a decontextualized grammar drill. The CF can be provided by the teacher or a peer and can take many forms, including recasts (reformulating a learner utterance in a more targetlike manner), prompts (discourse moves that encourage learners to self-correct), and metalinguistic explanations (detailed information on the nature of the learner error), among others. These discourse moves can provide negative evidence, or information about what is not possible in the target language. This is believed to be useful if not necessary for the development of fluency and accuracy in the L2.

Interactionist researchers have sought to identify an optimal type of CF given a set of learner characteristics (e.g., aptitude, working memory capacity, anxiety levels), contextual variables (e.g., the pedagogic orientation of the classroom), and linguistic target features (and in particular, the difficulty of the target) (Ellis &

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Shintani, 2013). Highlighting the interpersonal nature of CF, interactionist researchers have also investigated the characteristics of the interlocutors involved, including age (see Oliver & Azkarai, 2017 for a review), the relative proficiency of the interlocutors (e.g., native speaker, foreign language learner, heritage language learner; e.g., Mackey et al., 2003), and interpersonal dynamics (such as the learner's perceived competence of the interlocutor and the degree of cooperation between the two (Sato & Ballinger, 2016).

A number of avenues for future research have been identified in the literature. These include more research on linguistic targets beyond morphosyntax; investigating a wider variety of L2 learners, including less literate learners and those in non-instructional contexts (Tarone, 2010); examining the amount of CF that needs to be provided to best facilitate acquisition (Li, 2018); investigating the long-term effect of CF; and researching the extent to which interpersonal dynamics intersect with cognitive factors and feedback characteristics.

The Research Questions

1. What can teachers do to promote learner noticing and retention of CF?
2. What factors need to be considered in deciding what CF to use with a particular group of learners?
3. How much CF needs to be given to facilitate acquisition of a particular linguistic target?
4. How do different types of CF impact the development of various phonological targets?
5. How do different types of CF impact the development of various pragmatic targets?
6. How do different types of CF impact the development of L2 vocabulary?
7. To what extent do interpersonal dynamics between learners and their interlocutors influence the effect of CF on various L2 targets?
8. To what extent do characteristics of the learners' interlocutors (e.g., age, proficiency level) impact the efficacy of CF?
9. To what extent do learners' levels of motivation affect their attention to and retention of CF?
10. How do considerations of learner identity (e.g., class, political inequality) mediate the effects of various forms of CF?

Suggested Resources

Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie & T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* **(pp. 413–468). New York: Academic Press**.

Considered one of the foundational articles for the interactionist approach to second language acquisition, Long (1996) provides a detailed overview of the role of input (positive and negative evidence), output, and attention in L2 development. The role of corrective feedback in both first and second language acquisition is discussed.

Mackey, A. (2007). *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition.* **Oxford: Oxford University Press**.

This edited collection of empirical studies showcases research conducted in the area of interaction-driven L2 learning, including CF. The chapters on CF address perceptions of interactional feedback, the role of literacy in the processing of oral CF, individual difference factors in the processing of recasts, recasts in computer-mediated communication, and recasts in communicative EFL classes. Chapters on the effect of interactional feedback on linguistic development are also included, as is a meta-analysis on interaction research in SLA.

Mackey, A. (2012). *Input, interaction, and corrective feedback in L2 learning.* **Oxford: Oxford University Press.**

This book covers the theoretical and historical foundations of the Interactionist approach, providing detailed information on the key components involved: input, interaction, output, attention, and corrective feedback. The author also provides an overview of the methodologies used for studying interaction-based L2 learning and discusses the role of context and individual differences. Chapter 7 focuses on feedback, providing a detailed discussion of different types of feedback with examples drawn from the literature. Directions for future research, such as a greater focus on interpersonal and social factors, are also included.

Nassaji, H. (2015). *The interactional feedback dimension in instructed second language learning.* **London: Bloomsbury**.

This monograph focuses on CF from an interactionist perspective. In the first section, the author discusses multiple perspectives on CF before discussing the interactionist approach in particular. The second section overviews both descriptive and experimental research on CF, while the third focuses on the various factors that may influence the effectiveness of CF, including learners' perceptions and views. The fourth section highlights classroom practice. Each chapter ends with questions for discussion.

Nassaji, H., & Kartchava, E. (2017). *Corrective feedback in second language teaching and learning: Research, theory, applications, implications.* **New York: Routledge**.

This edited collection is divided into four parts: oral corrective feedback, computer-mediated feedback, written feedback, and student and teacher issues in feedback. Individual chapters synthesize existing research to discuss theoretical perspectives on oral feedback, factors influencing the effectiveness of peer feedback, the timing of feedback, feedback delivered in computer-mediated contexts, feedback on writing, teachers' and learners' beliefs on corrective feedback, and non-verbal feedback. Future directions and pedagogical implications are also provided.

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Li, S. (2018). Data collection in the research on the effectiveness of corrective feedback: A synthetic and critical review. In A. Gudmestad & A. Edmonds (Eds.), *Critical reflections on data in second language acquisition* (pp. 33–61). John Benjamins.

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Tarone, E. (2010). Second language acquisition by low-literate learners: An under-studied population. *Language Teaching, 43*, 75–83.

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