

## **Cognitive, Social and Psychological Dimensions of Corrective Feedback**

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### **Defining corrective feedback**

Corrective feedback takes the form of responses to learner utterances containing an error. The responses are other-initiated repairs and can consist of (1) an indication that an error has been committed, or (2) provision of the correct target language form, or (3) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these

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### **An example of a CF episode**

- T: When were you in school?  
L: Yes. I stand in the first row? (trigger)  
T: You stood in the first row. (corrective move)  
L: Yes, in the first row, and sit, ah, sat the first row. (uptake)

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### **The complexity of corrective feedback**

- Corrective feedback (CF) occurs frequently in instructional settings (but much less frequently in naturalistic settings)
- CF is addressed in all popular handbooks for language teachers
- CF has been the subject of a large number of empirical studies (Russell and Spada (2006) identified 56 studies)
- Few clear conclusions are yet possible.
- A full understanding of CF requires a multiple perspectives approach

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### **Dimensions of corrective feedback**

1. The cognitive dimension – this accounts for how learners process CF for acquisition (i.e. it examines the interactions between input, output and the learner's internal mechanisms.
2. The social dimension – this addresses the role played by context in which CF takes place, the social background of the participants and how the participants jointly construct the social context of CF.
3. The psychological dimension – this concerns how individual factors such as beliefs about learning and personality impact on the teacher's choice of CF strategies and the learners' responses.

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### **The Cognitive Dimension**

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### **Nativist vs. cognitive theories**

Nativist theories of L2 acquisition reject any role for CF on the grounds that language acquisition requires only positive evidence.

Cognitive theories view CF as making an important contribution to L2 acquisition by assisting learners to pay attention to linguistic form and facilitating rehearsal of linguistic forms.

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### **Theoretical perspectives**

1. The Interaction Hypothesis (Long 1996)
2. The Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985; 1995)
3. The Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt 1994; 2001)
4. Focus on form (Long 1991)

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### **Key premises**

CF works for acquisition providing that certain conditions are met:

1. Participants are focussed primarily on meaning in the context of producing and understanding messages in communication
2. In the course of this, they produce errors.
3. They receive feedback that they recognize as corrective.
4. The feedback causes them to notice the errors they have committed.

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### **Key premises (cont.)**

5. They compare their own production and the feedback ('noticing-the-gap')
6. As a result they construct a form-function mapping for the problematic form.
7. They modify their original utterance by correcting the error (i.e. 'uptake with repair'), thereby rehearsing and consolidating the form-function mapping.
8. They subsequently incorporate the corrected form into their interlanguages depending on their readiness to do so.

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### **Example (1)**

S: I have an alib[bi]	S mispronounces 'alibi'
T: You have what?	T requests clarification
S: An alib[bi]	S repeats same error
T: An alib__? (.2.) An alib[ay]	T tries to elicit correct pronunciation and the corrects
S: alib[ai]	S fails again
T: okay, listen, listen, alib[ay]	T models correct pronunciation
SS: alib(ay)	Ss repeat model chorally

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### **Commentary**

- The participants are initially focussed on meaning
- The teacher corrects
- The student is aware he has made an error and notices what the error is
- The student experiences difficulty in noticing-the-gap (but may have done so ultimately)
- The student fails to repair the error
- There is no evidence to show if acquisition has taken place

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### Example (2)

S: we ,don't. catch, we can't	S produces tense and lexical error
T: we didn't	T partially recasts
S: we didn't	S uptake with repair
T: we didn't catch it, we didn't keep it, we threw it back, ah, very good, so you didn't eat it?	T expands S's response and corrects the lexical error; T then continues with the discourse

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### Commentary

- Initial focus on meaning
- Student perceives the feedback as corrective and notices error
- Student successfully notices the gap for the tense error
- No evidence that the learner has constructed a form-function mapping or acquired the correct form
- No evidence that the learner has noticed the lexical error

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### Problems with the cognitive approach to CF (1)

How essential is it that CF occurs as a response to a communicative problem?

- Long (2006) argues it is essential
- Lyster (2001) suggests that negotiation of form can be as effective as negotiation of meaning
- Ellis, Basturkmen and Lowen (2001) found that code-oriented feedback was more common than meaning-oriented
- It is not always clear whether a CF episode involves form or meaning negotiation.

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### Problems with the cognitive approach (2)

To what extent is it essential that learners recognize the corrective force of the CF?

- Carroll (2001) argued that learners need to recognize that the feedback is corrective and irrelevant to the ongoing discourse
- Leeman (2003) suggested that feedback (recasts) can work as a result of the positive rather than negative evidence they provide
- There is growing evidence that CF works best when it is more explicit

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### Do learners have to notice their errors and notice the gap?

- Carroll (2001) argued that learners must not only notice the error but also what kind of error it is
- Mackey et al (2000) reported that learners have problems noticing morphological errors
- Mackey (2006) found that learners noticed corrections of question forms but not of plurals and past tense.

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### How important is uptake?

- Long (2006) argues uptake plays no significant role in acquisition (i.e. it is provision of the correct form that is important)
- Lyster (2004) argued that uptake with repair was crucially important (i.e. output-prompting CF worked better than input-providing)
- Loewen (2000) provided evidence to show that uptake is related to acquisition

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### **Making CF work**

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Han (2002) proposed four conditions for recasts:

1. Individualized attention
2. A consistent focus on a single grammatical feature
3. The developmental readiness of the learners
4. Intensity of the CF

But such conditions may be difficult to achieve in many classroom settings.

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### **Final comment on the cognitive dimension**

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The idea that it is possible to identify an approach to CF that will be effective for all learners – the aim of a cognitive theory of CF - is an attractive one. But researchers are a long way from agreeing what that approach should be. Furthermore it may be fundamentally mistaken to look for one single approach given the social and individual learner factors that must be taken into account if CF is to be made to work for all learners.

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### **The social dimension**

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### **The asocial nature of CF research in general**

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CF research has focused on the generic feedback strategies used by teachers with little or no account taken of the social background of the learners or the teacher or the classroom context in which the feedback takes place or the specific activity in which learners are engaged. Both written and oral CF research have been driven by what Block (2003) called the 'Input-Interaction-Output Model' and reflect Tarone's (2000) critique of SLA in general - 'too much SLA research focuses on psycholinguistic processes in the abstract and does not consider the social context of L2 learning' (p. 182).

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### **The effect of context**

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- Chaudron (1988) – extent of CF depends on setting (FL vs. SL) and on pedagogical focus (grammar-based vs. communication-based)
- Seedhouse (2004) – differences in CF evident in form and accuracy contexts; indirect CF preferred in former but direct in the latter
- Ohta (2001) – learners respond differently to feedback in teacher-fronted and peer-learning settings, with uptake higher in the latter.

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### **The effect of macro-setting on CF**

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Sheen (2004) investigated CF in four contexts:

- Canada immersion
- Canada ESL
- New Zealand ESL
- Korea EFL

Marked differences in frequency of different CF types (e.g. recasts more frequent in Korea EFL than in other contexts; elicitation more common in Canada immersion).

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### **Effect of context on uptake**

- Sheen (2004) – overall uptake and uptake with repair more common in New Zealand ESL and Korea EFL than the Canada contexts.
- Lyster and Mori (2006) – output-prompting CF led to higher levels of uptake and repair in Canada immersion but recasts did so in Japan immersion (‘counterbalance hypothesis’).

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### **CF as a discourse event**

An alternative way of viewing the social dimension of CF is to view it as a discourse event that is co-constructed by the participants depending on their own understanding of what the purpose of the interaction is.

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### **An example**

S1: was anything foond by his body  
 S2: pardon  
 S1: was anything foond, foo, foo  
 T: watch me, watch me // found  
 S1: found  
 T: found  
 S1: found  
 T: found  
 S1: found  
 T: ow, ow, found  
 S1: found  
 T: found  
 S: found  
 T: found yeah  
 S1: found by his body

#### *Commentary*

In the communicative language classroom there is a tension between ‘communicating’ and ‘learning/teaching’. This tension is constantly negotiated by the participants.

Here we see the participants move seamlessly between a ‘meaning-focussed context’ and a ‘form-and-accuracy context’.

This is possible because of the shared sense of social context) of the participants (i.e. ‘intersubjectivity’).

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### **Final comment on the social dimension**

Teachers and learners vary in how they orientate to CF depending on:

- Institutional context
- Nature of the pedagogical activity
- Social background

CF is not a monolithic phenomenon but is as highly variable as any other type of language use.

Nor is CF something that teacher ‘do’ to students. Rather it is co-constructed reflecting the participants understanding of the classroom context.

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### **The Psychological Dimension**

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### **Learner attitudes to CF**

Surveys of learners’ attitudes to written CF (e.g. Leki 1991) show that they rate it as very important, prefer to be corrected by the teacher than a peer, and are accepting of the value of indirect feedback (Hyland and Hyland 2006).

Learners’ and teachers’ beliefs about CF differ with teachers demonstrating much less confidence in the efficacy of error correction than their students (Schultz 2001).

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### **The case of Wes: a functional learner**

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Schmidt (1983) reported that Wes received frequent corrective feedback from his native speaker interlocutors but this appeared to have little effect on his interlanguage development.

His typical response to CF was simply to repeat what he said (e.g. he continued to use 'money girl' to refer to a prostitute).

Wes certainly paid attention to CF but was little interested in developing formal accuracy and expected his native speaker interlocutors to understand him.

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### **The case of Younghee Sheen – a code-oriented learner**

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Sheen (2006) in the introduction to her doctoral thesis reports that she was both aware of being corrected by her native speaking friends and also noticed the correction and noticed-the gap.

But she also refers to a Korean friend (Junhan) who, like Wes, was often unaware of being corrected and showed a much lower level of receptivity to CF.

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### **Sheen's study of individual difference factors**

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1. Positive learner attitudes towards CF correlated significantly with gains from explicit CF but not with gains from implicit CF (recasts).
2. Language analytical ability also correlated with gains from explicit CF.
3. Language anxiety was found to correlate more strongly with gains resulting from oral than written CF; only low anxiety learners benefited from recasts.

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### **Individual differences in uptake**

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Ohta (2001) reported marked differences in the levels of uptake in the seven learners of L2 Japanese she investigated. Two learners produced no uptake at all while another demonstrated uptake at every opportunity.

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### **Final comment on the psychological dimension**

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Two key questions:

1. What kind of theory is needed to explain why CF works with some learners and not with others?
2. How can teachers most effectively take account of individual differences in learners when providing CF?

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### **Sociocultural theory**

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## Key constructs in sociocultural theory

1. Learning occurs *in* rather than as a *result of* interaction – the centrality of dialogic interaction as a context for externalising artifacts that mediate learning.
2. Affordances arise through the successful tailoring of interaction to the developmental level of individual learners ('scaffolding').
3. The Zone of Proximal Development.

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## Some general principles in a sociocultural view of CF

1. CF is a collaborative endeavour.
2. CF must be contingent (i.e. if the learner can self-correct, CF is not needed)
3. CF must be flexible, adapted to both the social/situational context and the individual learner.
4. CF will be successful if it enables the participants to jointly construct a ZPD for the learner.
5. Thus, XF must be graduated, providing no more help than is necessary to enable the learner to correct the error.
6. CF must take account of the learner's affective needs.
7. No one type of CF is inherently superior to another type.
8. Learner uptake with repair is beneficial – it constitutes the first step towards self-regulation.
9. It is the learner, not the teacher, who must decide whether to appropriate feedback from an 'expert'.

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## Two key studies

1. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) – one-on-one interactions arising between 3 L2 learners and a tutor who provided corrective feedback on their writing.
2. Nassaji and Swain (2000) – a tutor's oral feedback on the writing of two Korean learners; feedback differed according to whether it was within the learner's ZPD or random.

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## An example

S: oh my god, it is too expensive, I pay only 10 dollars	S fails to use future form.
T: I pay?	T repeats S's utterance
S2: okay let's go	Another S interrupts
T: I pay or I'll pay? (.1.) I will pay, I'll	T corrects using increasingly more explicit strategies
S: I'll, I'll pay only 10 dollars	S responds by repairing error (uptake)

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## From theory to practice

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## My own CF policy

1. CF works! Teachers should not be afraid to correct.
2. Ts need to negotiate goals for CF with students.
3. Ts need to ensure Ss know they are being corrected.
4. Ts need to adapt their CF strategies to the particular S being corrected.
5. Ts need to allow time for students to repair their error following Cf.
6. Ts should vary who, when and how they correct in accordance with cognitive and affective needs of the individual learner. They should be 'inconsistent'.
7. Ts may need to correct the same error several times to enable the S to achieve self-regulation.
8. Ts should abandon if it is a source of anxiety to a learner.

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**Using the policy**

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Teachers need to formulate their own policy for correcting their students' errors. The function of the kind of research-based policy I have just presented is to not prescribe how to correct errors but to offer a set of provisional specifications that teachers can use as a basis for working out their own explicit policy.

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