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Analysis and Evaluation of the Effectiveness of a Teacher's Feedback in Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

The impact of teacher feedback on learner uptake in second language learning classrooms has received much attention from researchers over the last decade. The I-R-F exchange structure reflects the interactive process in the classroom, with the F-move focusing on the ways in which the teacher gives feedback to students' responses, which are both positive and negative (Ellis, 2009). Corrective feedback (CF) is frequently used in the classroom as a form of negative feedback in language teaching, yet its effectiveness is disputed in second language acquisition (SLA) research (Ellis, 2009; Lyster et al., 2012). Through a video observation of a classroom with A2 proficiency learners in English, the teacher used a combination of positive feedback and different types of corrective feedback, with the majority of students self-correcting following the teacher's feedback, but there were some students whose uptake was unsuccessful. This means that teacher feedback contributes to a certain extent to learners' language acquisition.

Keywords: positive response, corrective feedback, classroom discourse, student uptake

1. Introduction

This essay will focus on the feedback techniques used by a teacher in a video-recorded lesson, then explore the different types of use of corrective feedback (CF) by the teacher, in order to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the teacher using these feedback techniques and evaluate whether they are effective in promoting the completion of the task objectives of the lesson. To be more specific, this essay will be based on an analysis of a part of a video lesson transcript, which is a recording of a real class for elementary (A2) proficiency adult students and the teacher is a native English speaker. The focus in this class is the judgment of the prepositions of place, the pronunciation of some words and phrases and the use of the continuous tense. In the class, the teacher uses the whiteboard to elicit answers and nominate different students for class interaction.

The I-R-F (Initiate—Respond—Follow-up) exchange structure is a common and traditional model in English language teaching (ELT), this structure shows the classroom interaction in which the teacher asks questions, the students respond, and the teacher follows up or gives feedback. The F-move is the third part of the IRF structure, which is regarded as the teacher's 'follow-up' or 'feedback' to the students (Cullen, 2002). According to Ellis (2009), "feedback can be positive and negative" and "CF constitutes one type of negative feedback" (p.3). Positive feedback is usually the affirmation of students' answers (e.g. good, excellent and well done), while negative feedback refers to the lack of authenticity or deviation in the language of learners' discourse (Ellis, 2009). Teachers would follow up the conversation with words like 'good', which seems to be more like giving positive feedback to students, but whether that feedback is always meaningful is a question worth considering. However, negative feedback is also common in the classroom. So far, corrective feedback has been a common form of classroom oral feedback and considered by some researchers to be effective in improving students' language ability, but some other researchers question this view. Ellis (2009) pointed out some problems with CF, whether students' errors should be corrected, which errors should be corrected, who should correct the errors, which type of CF is more effective, and when to correct the errors. Therefore, the effectiveness of classroom CF is a controversial topic in second language acquisition (SLA) research (Ellis, 2009; Lyster et al., 2012).

The essay will first review some of the literature on teachers' follow-up, feedback, and CF, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of different types of feedback. Then, based on the transcript of the video, analyze the feedback observed in the classroom and evaluate whether the feedback was effective in helping the students achieve the course goals of the lesson, according to the criteria in the mentioned literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classroom Discourse and Teaching

Classroom discourse is defined by Walsh (2011) as "the relationship between language, interaction and learning" (p.1). Whether the interaction between teachers and students in an English as foreign/second classroom can help students improve their professional practice and language ability has always been the focus and discussion of educational scholars Walsh (2011). Classrooms provide a platform for teachers and students to communicate and it "can be characterised and described by looking at a range of interactional features such as teacher elicitation strategies, learner responses and teacher evaluations" (Walsh, 2011, p.25). The I-R-F exchange structure is a typical model of classroom discourse. According to Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model, the structure is divided into three stages. In the first stage, 'I' means that the teacher asks or elicits questions, 'R' is the students' response, and 'F' is the F-move, which means it is the follow-up comment by the teacher. In many previous studies, the first two phases have been well studied, but the F-move phase has been less studied (Cullen, 2002). However, teachers' follow-up and feedback play an important role in classroom interaction. "Feedback is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy" (Ellis, 2009, p.3), and this means that feedback contributes to language learning to some extent. Nonetheless, different feedback methods have different influences on the learning gains of learners.

2.2 Feedback in the Classroom

2.2.1 Teachers' Follow-up or Feedback

On the one hand, the follow-up has an evaluative role, as Cullen (2002) claimed, "the teacher's F-move has a primarily evaluative function: it gives the students feedback about whether the response was acceptable or not" (p.117). The researcher also pointed out that the evaluative role mainly focuses on the form of students' responses, such as whether the use of lexical items or grammatical structures has been appropriate (Cullen, 2002). For example, in the video lesson, the teacher pays attention to the incorrect pronunciation of words (e.g. the pronunciation of the phrase *on top of*), vocabulary collocation (e.g. shirt yellow or yellow shirt?) and grammatical structures (e.g. using the present continuous tense) in the feedback. In addition, in the class video, he uses a lot of expressions such as *good* and *well done*, which are the affirmation of the students' response when following up. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that sometimes the praise given by the teacher may be inappropriate. For example, when a student answers incorrectly, the teacher's responding with 'good' is ambiguous, which may cause the students to ignore their errors (Ellis, 2009; Wong & Waring, 2009). These examples also confirm the researchers' interpretation of follow-up as the role of evaluation, "the feedback may be an explicit acceptance or rejection of the response" or "some other indication that the response was not acceptable" (Cullen, 2002, p.119). The former refers to the markers commonly used by teachers in feedback, such as good, excellent, and well done, while the latter refers to the feedback in the way of questioning or raising the intonation of the voice.

From another aspect, the follow-up also has a discoursal role, whose emphasis is correcting the content rather than the form from students' responses (Cullen, 2002). Different from the role of evaluation, the aim of the discoursal role is not to give feedback to the individual student, but hopes to build and expand the discussion by reformulating the students' contributions as a kind of support (Cullen, 2002). For instance, the teacher makes some personal comments or humorous jokes based on the students' answers, which will increase the real communication between the teacher and the students. Walsh (2011) noted that "feedback on the message rather than its form is also more conducive to genuine communication" (p.34).

Therefore, by comparing the feedback focusing on the form and the feedback focusing on the content, we can know that the content feedback is more communicative than the form feedback, which may help improve the oral expression ability of students, such as fluency. On the contrary, formal feedback lacks a real communication context, but it may improve the accuracy of students' utterances. However, Cullen (2002) considered that "if the teacher only gives evaluative follow-up, it will impede the development of a communicative classroom dialogue between the teacher and the class", as well as "if the teacher only gives discoursal follow-up, s/he will not necessarily help the students to notice and repair their errors" (p.122). In addition, it also depends on the 'goal of the moment' (Walsh, 2011). If the teacher is covering a language point and the pattern may be more strict IRF but when engaging in fluency development it will be different. Thus, in the classroom, teachers need to try to balance the use of the two types of feedback.

2.2.2 Types of Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback (CF) is typically form-focused feedback. Ellis (2009) interprets that CF is the teacher's

response to learners' errors in language expression in different forms. In previous studies, CF was generally divided into seven categories, they were recasts, repetition, clarification request, explicit correction, metalinguistic explanation, elicitation and paralinguishtic signal (Ellis, 2009; Lyster et al., 2012). In the study by Lyster et al. (2012), recasts were further divided into two types: conversational recasts and didactic recasts. In addition, these seven types of CF can be divided into four dimensions, implicit reformulation, explicit reformulation, implicit prompts and explicit prompts (Lyster et al., 2012).

First of all, Ellis (2009) explains that a recast refers to when the corrector corrects the mistakes when repeating the utterance but does not directly tell the learner about the error, which requires him/her to pay attention to and find the error by themselves. Furthermore, conversational recasts "often take the form of confirmation checks" (Lyster et al., 2012, p.4), which is an implicit form of feedback. An example of using conversational recasts in the video is when a student answers incoherently 'Emm...' after omitting the important information, the teacher gives the answer 'he's watching the people?' in an interrogative tone with raised intonation to confirm the meaning. On the contrary, didactic recasts refer to "a reformulation of a student utterance in the absence of a communication problem" (Lyster et al., 2012, p.4). For instance, one student says 'between the two box', then the teacher corrects it to 'boxes'. The benefit of the recast is that it promotes semantic transparency through changes in phonemes, vocabulary, etc., but researchers also argue that it may be more suitable for skilled learners, since lower proficiency learners may ignore or fail to pay attention to the feedback (Goo, 2012). Moreover, repetition and elicitation are the two of the most common forms of corrective feedback, the former is "a verbatim repetition of a student utterance, often with adjusted intonation to highlight the error" and the latter "directly elicits a self-correction from the student" (Lyster el al., 2012, p.4). According to the research by Zare et al. (2020), most students preferred elicitation, because they consider that prompts may engage them to realize their mistakes and find answers, as well as self-correction increases confidence, yet low proficiency students in the study thought it was a bad idea, saying they were laughed at by their peers when their mistakes were pointed out by teachers. Furthermore, in both explicit correction and metalinguistic explanation, the corrector directly points out the learner's expression errors, which means that the teacher directly tells the learner their errors. In this way, students may clearly know how to correct errors. However, some researchers argue that most students oppose this direct approach. Explicit corrections may cause students to lose confidence, especially for young learners, so teachers should be cautious when using these two correction techniques in the classroom (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Zare et al., 2020). In addition, many previous studies have discussed the clarification request in CF, which is also called negotiation of meaning, which means teachers indicate that they have not understood what the leaner has said (Ellis, 2009); for example, the teacher says 'how do you spell it?' in this lesson, in order to confirm information from a student's response. The last type is the paralinguistic signal, which means "an attempt to non-verbally elicit the correct form from the learner" (Lyster et al., 2012, p.4). In other words, body language is used to elicit responses from students, but there has been little research on this type of feedback.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Description of the Lesson

The language knowledge points of this class are the judgment of positional prepositions and the use of the present continuous tense. Due to the students' low level of English proficiency, there would be some errors when students answer the questions. In the lesson, the teacher gives different types of follow-up and feedback. On the one hand, the teacher gives the students a large number of positive responses, such as *good*, *excellent*, *well done* and other encouraging responses. In addition, the teacher also carries out content feedback to promote students' understanding of the knowledge. However, on the other hand, the teacher pays more attention to formal feedback of the answers, namely the teacher implements different types of CF. According to the statistics of the excerpted transcripts, Table 1 (see below) demonstrates that there are four types of CF that are widely implemented. Among them, *repetition* is used the most frequently, followed by *elicitation*, and the occurrence of *recasts* is slightly more than *explicit correction.* Moreover, the number of positive responses is also counted in the table. Yet since the teacher does not use *metalinguistic explanation* and only offered one *clarification request* and *paralinguistic signal*, therefore, the following sections will focus on the four most frequently use CF moves and positive feedback moves.

Table 1. Teacher's follow-up and corrective feedback on students' errors

Type of feedback	Number of feedback moves	Percentage of total corrective feedback moves (%)
Repetition	14	37.84%
Elicitation	9	24.32%
Didactic recasts	6	18.92%
Conversational recasts	1	
Explicit correction	5	13.51%
Clarification request	1	0.03%
Metalinguistic explanation	0	0
Paralinguistic signal	1	0.03%
Total (types of CF)	37	100%
Positive response (e.g. good, excellent, well done)	32	——

3.2 Analysis of Teacher's Follow-up Moves

3.2.1 Positive Responses

The teacher uses positive responses and follow-up moves such as 'good', 'excellent' and 'well done' a total of 32 times. Such encouraging words may make students feel that their answers have been recognized and thus increase their willingness to speak. The following examples show a direct positive response from the teacher.

Extract 1

T: OK, where is the cat, Karina?

S5: In front of the box.

T: *Good good*, ...

Extract 2

T: (points out) this cat?

S1: this cat is opposite this cat.

T: *Excellent.*

Extract 3

T: Where is this picture? Any ideas?

Ss: Kitchen.

T: Kitchen, *well done, well done, well done*. How do you know, Clever? How do you know it's the kitchen? What can you see?

These follow-up moves are all affirmation and praise of the answers, which indicates that they are acceptable. Nonetheless, positive and encouraging feedback is not appropriate for all follow-up moves. As discussed in the literature review, Wong and Waring (2009) have claimed that inappropriate praise sometimes offered by the teacher may hinder learning, and the teacher's goals may be ambiguous. In other words, teachers sometimes give praise to students who answer incorrectly, and even though the teacher just wants to respond to the correct part of the utterance, this may also cause students to ignore their own errors or think their answers are correct. Most of the positive feedback the teacher uses in this lesson is facilitative, but some of it is probably unnecessary (see an example below).

Extract 4

S1: In front of hotel.

T: *Good*, in front of the hotel.

In this interaction, the article 'the' is missing in the student's answer, but the teacher first gives 'good' in his

response and then corrects the student's error directly without any hint. He does recast though with the correct form but it seems to be contradictory ('good' but then recasting). To some extent, 'good' here is invalid, and the student may even directly ignore the need to use the article 'the' in this utterance.

3.2.2 Repetition

This is the most frequently used CF move. As mentioned in the literature review, repetition is the expression of the teacher alone to prompt the students of their errors by changing their pronunciation and intonation, especially by raising the intonation and using an interrogative tone (Ellis, 2009; Lyster et al., 2012).

Extract 5

T: OK, look around. Yuka, where is the printer?

S1: behind beside me.

T: *beside you (rising intonation)*? (*repetition*)

Extract 6

T: ok, let's have a look. Good, good. So what are these, Demo?

S6: This is drawers.

T: *This is (rising intonation)*? (*part-repetition*)

In the first excerpt, the teacher wants to test the students' judgment of prepositions of place; the student gives an answer 'beside', but the answer is not accurate enough, so the teacher repeats 'beside you?' with rising intonation to remind the student that the preposition is not correct. At the same time, the student is clearly aware of her wrong use of the preposition and corrects it immediately. The second excerpt takes the same form of feedback. Therefore, in these two excerpts, the teacher raises the intonation by repeating the students' words completely or partially, which easily makes the students realize that they need to correct their answers. From another aspect, since repetition almost permeates all types of CF, it means that partial repetition can also occur in the recasts and elicitation sections, thus, sometimes the teacher just repeats the student's expression without further explanation, which may not be clear to the goal of prompting the student to correct their errors. However, there are fewer studies on the limitations of repetition, but in my personal experience, I may misunderstand some of the mistakes which I have made if the teacher repeats them without clear instructions. There is a similar example in this video:

Extract 7

T: What's he wearing?

S6: the shirt yellow, and trousers green.

T: ok, *shirt yellow (rising intonation)*? *(part repetition)*

S6: Orange, orange (*misunderstanding*)

T: A yellow shirt. He's wearing a yellow shirt.

In this excerpt, the teacher seems to want the student to answer in the continuous tense, yet there are two problems which the answer, one is the wrong order of vocabulary collocation, the other is the lack of a complete sentence answer in the continuous tense. Nevertheless, the teacher simply repeats 'shirt yellow?', which causes the student to misunderstand the teacher's intention that the color word is used incorrectly, and gives the answer 'orange'. Therefore, here the teacher may change the feedback way, such as elicitation ('what is the complete answer using the continuous tense'?), which may have a clearer instruction.

3.2.3 Elicitation

Elicitation has different techniques. First of all, "teachers elicit completion of their own utterance by strategically pausing to allow students to 'fill in the blank' as it were" (Lyster & Ranta, p.48). As in the following example:

Extract 8

S3: the cat is next the box.

T: ok, the cat is next...(*part repetition & elicitation*)

S3: to?

T: next to the box. Ok, everybody, next to.

Here the teacher repeats part of the student's utterance, then pauses at 'next' to elicit the 'to'. In addition, another

technique is "the teacher uses questions to elicit correct forms" (Lyster & Ranta, p.48), for instance, using *wh*-questions to prompt students to correct by themselves. See extract 9:

Extract 9

T: The man, where is he standing?

S4: On the...on the floor

T: He standing *on the floor (rising intonation)*? (*part-repetition*)

But *where* is floor? (*wh- question elicitation*)

S4: Bal...(the student doesn't know how to pronounce it)

T: Balcony. On the balcony. Or he's standing on the balcony.

The teacher uses the 'where' question to make the student rethink his answer. As discussed in the literature review, Zare et al. (2020) have stated that elicitation is an effective way for students to find and recognize their own errors in expression and make self-correction, however, they also argue that some learners will feel embarrassed when the teacher points out their errors and waits for them to give new correct answers. Whereas, in these two extracts and all elicitation moves in this class, most of the students successfully realized where the errors were and could correct them, which proves the effectiveness of this feedback method to a certain extent.

3.2.4 Didactic and Conversational Recasts

The teacher uses the didactic recasts more often than the conversational recasts, and the teacher uses the recasts slightly less frequently than the elicitation discussed in the previous section. Examples of these two types of recasts are as follows:

Extract 10

T: Good. Ok, and what's he doing, Karina?

S5: Emm... it is...emm...the people...

T: He's watching the people? (*conversational recasts*)

S5: Yes.

Extract 11

T: Jay, what's this?

S4: Window.

T: a window. (*didactic recasts*)

Comparing these two feedback moves, the conversational recasts are more communicative than the didactic recasts. Both methods also give direct answers, but the former seems to be asking the student, while in the latter the teacher does not tell the student where the mistake is or explain why it is wrong, but just repeats the correct answer 'a window', adding the indirect article. As Goo (2012) considered, this type of feedback may be more suitable for skilled English learners, yet for low English proficiency, they may still ignore the error. It is difficult to determine whether the student will remember to use the article in future similar expressions.

3.2.5 Explicit Correction

Explicit correction is the most direct feedback method compared to the previous CF Moves. Take the following two excerpts:

Extract 12

T: He's watching the people. What's he doing?

Ss: shave.

T: **No**, he's shaving. (*explicit correction*)

Extract 13

T: where is the cat?

S2: beside?...

T: emm... **not** beside (*explicit correction*)

S2: yeah yeah, next to next to the yeah.

Unlike the recasts, explicit correction tells students directly where the errors are, such as here the teacher uses 'no' and 'not'. Thus, from the students' answers, it can be seen that they are able to find and self-correct quickly. However, as discussed in the literature review, some researchers have claimed that it is risky for teachers to excessively use explicit correction, because teachers might point out mistakes too directly, which may cause students to lose confidence and reduce their willingness to speak (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Zare et al., 2020). Whereas it is worth mentioning that the teacher only uses the explicit correction five times, and the students in this class are all adult learners, so the explicit correction used by the teacher is effective in promoting the improvement of students' language ability to a certain extent.

4. Conclusion

This essay discusses the different follow-up moves and the different types of CF that the teacher uses in a lesson. On the one hand, he uses numerous positive responses, which are encouraging to a certain extent, but some discourses of praise are redundant, and they may even hinder students' acquisition of language knowledge. Repetition, elicitation, recasts and explicit correction are the four types of CF that are frequently used. One of the main objectives of this class was to ask students to accurately use different prepositions of place. Although some of the feedback moves seem to be ambiguous about the instruction of error, we can find that students have the consciousness of self-correction in the second half of the lesson, which means that the teacher's feedback is effective to a large extent. As for the possible recommendations of using feedback in this class, firstly, the teacher could add some paralinguistic signals, which would be helpful to understand the prepositions of place by using body language. In addition, in order to increase the communication in class and the interaction between students, the teacher could also use clarification requests and peer feedback. The former may increase the meaning of negotiation between the teacher and students, the latter "will be important for the teacher to establish a tone of mutual support, so that learners are not overwhelmed by corrective input" (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p.108), namely a technique can be to nominate another student when a student has not got an answer right. For further research, researchers may do a teacher's stimulated recall, so that researchers can collect more data from the teacher involved.

All in all, there is no uniform criteria for which feedback method is the most effective, which requires a combination of different forms according to students' level, age and course content. In this class, for adult English learners at the elementary proficiency, the teacher uses abundant feedback moves. To some extent, the teacher's follow-up and feedback are effective for language learning in this context.

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