

# Teacher Corrective Oral Feedback in the Classroom

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The article reports on a study of teacher corrective oral feedback in Iris Becker Elementary School, a public school serving pupils from kindergarten-5<sup>th</sup> grade in Dearborn, Michigan. Some researchers claim that teacher corrective oral feedback is beneficial to L2 learning while others discard its merit. This study is an attempt to explore this topic further with young learners. The method used in the study included one classroom observation. The participants included one mainstream classroom teacher and about 25 students. The results show high teacher corrective oral feedback.

*Keywords:* corrective feedback, error treatment, oral feedback, English as Second Language, second language acquisition

The benefits of teacher corrective oral feedback are controversial. While some researchers (Aljaafreh and Lantolf, 1994, Higgs and Clifford, 1982, Bley-Vroman, 1994, Hammerly, 1987, Chaudron, 1988, White, 1991, Schwartz, 1993, DeKeyser, 1994, Schmidt, 1990, Lyster and Panova, 2002) point out the positive effects of teacher corrective oral feedbacks in the classroom, other researchers (Hendrickson, 1978, Larsen-Freeman 2000, Lightbown, 1991, Lightbown and Spada, 1993 and 2006, Doughty and Varela, 1998) doubt them. Han (2002) believes that depending on how it is used, it could be beneficial. Or as Lochtman (2002) puts it, the importance of teacher corrective oral feedback is much discussed.

There are many pupils who struggle with learning and it is common practice for teachers to give corrective oral feedbacks. The purpose of this study is to investigate the different types of corrective oral feedback and determine which types lead to student repair and which types do not lead to student repair. Unlike previous studies that have investigated laboratory like settings, this study examined real school settings. Results obtained in this experiment can help educators make better decisions regarding the use of corrective oral feedback. Ultimately, the goal is to help pupils learn better.

## Materials and Methods

Corrective feedback (CF) is defined as “any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance” (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 574). The notion that learners may need negative evidence such as error feedback or explicit instruction has presently lead to the eminence of CF studies in English as a Second Language (ESL) and other L2 education contexts (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 573). The reasons for studying CF include claims about the significance of negative feedback in grown-ups (Ellis, 2004, p. 236). According to Doughty and Williams (1998) the role of CF in the process of learning a foreign language is still much debated (Lochtman, 2002, p. 272) and opinions on the purpose of CF can be very mixed or split (Han, 2002, p. 1).

Researchers such as Hendrickson (1978) and Larsen-Freeman (1981) made the following claims about errors and corrections: 1) errors are a natural result of the communication development skills, 2) correction distracts the learner’s attention from the communicative task, 3) correction forces the learner to focus on the form instead of the meaning and 4) correction activates the learner’s affective filter, which

blocks learning. These assumptions lead teachers to ignore errors in classrooms (Han, 2002, p. 2). A study by Doughty (1994) on CF found that the teacher gave approximately half of the feedback to students' incorrect utterances (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 576). Theoretically speaking, corrective feedback is capable of advancing the learning process, but that is not always true in practice (Han, 2002, p. 9). Doughty and Varela (1998), Lightbown (1991), Lightbown and Spada (1990) and White (1991) considered CF as having little importance in the classroom. Some research showed that early form-focused instruction might make it harder rather than easier for learners to discover the underlying structure of the target language and it has been suggested that form-focused instruction and CF can lead only to temporary and/or superficial changes in learner performance (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p. 206).

Researchers such as Higgs and Clifford (1982) and Hammerly (1987) argued that L2 learners exposed to natural language acquisition or communicative language teaching without error correction and form focus will eventually stop learning. Some SLA researchers, such as Bley-Vroman (1986), White (1991) and Schwartz (1993) considered CF to be necessary for second language learning. Dekeyser (1994) and Schmidt (1994) regarded CF as an essential element of explicit teaching that tries to make the learner be aware of the formal features of the input and help them see the difference between these features and those in their own interlanguage. Chaudron (1988) claimed that for most learners, CF may be the most successful source of improvement in target language development (Han, 2002, p. 7). Swain (1995) stated, "An additional effect of CF may be the enhancement of learners' metalinguistic awareness" (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 574). Han (2002) acknowledged CF as especially indispensable in classroom SLA (p. 24). Evidence from previous studies showed that CF seems to advance learning (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1974, p. 466).

Corrective feedback is classified into six types: 1) explicit correction, 2) recasts, 3) clarification requests, 4) metalinguistic feedback or clues (as stated in Gibbons, 2006, p. 52), 5) elicitation, and 6) repetition of error (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 576), all of which were the focus of this research. While most corrective oral feedback does fall into the above categories they do not cover all types of oral feedback.

**1. Explicit Correction:** It refers to the explicit provision of the correct form and generally is needed for treating learning problems that are categorized as error (Han, 2002, p. 14). As the teacher provides the correct form, he/she clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect. Carroll and Swain (1974 cited in Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1974, p. 466) demonstrated

that learners who received explicit correction overall are superior on experimental assignments than the learners who received implicit feedback. Example of explicit correction:

S: The day . . . tomorrow. (lexical error)

T: Yes. No, the day before yesterday. (explicit correction) (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 584).

**2. Recasts:** Recast involve the teacher's reformulation of student's entire speech or some of it without the error (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 46). Long (1996) defined recasts as implicit CF that reformulates/builds an incorrect/incomplete speech clearly, parallel to the type of recasts used by caregivers in a child's first language acquisition (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 582). Recasts also include translations in response to a student's use of the L1 (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 47). Recasts are by and large implicit and are not presented by such phrases "You mean," "Use this word," and "You should say." Some recasts focus on one word, however, some combine the grammatical or lexical modification as part of discourse. Recasts do not promote immediate learner repair (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 577). Example of Recast:

S: . . . I looking for my pen.

T: You are looking for your pen. (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 575).

**3. Clarification Requests:** based on Spada and Fröhlich (1995) clarification requests indicate to students that their speech has been misjudged by the teacher or that the speech is somehow incorrect and needs a reiteration or a reformulation. Clarification requests can deal with problems in either understanding or accuracy, or both (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 47) and often seek clarification of the meaning as well (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 583).

S: I want practice today, today. (grammatical error)

T: I'm sorry? (clarification request) (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 583).

**4. Metalinguistic Feedback or Clues:** In this type of feedback, the teacher asks questions or offers comments or information connected to the formation of the student's utterance without supplementing the correct form. For example, the teacher may say, "Do we say it like that?" "That's not how you say it in French," and "Is it feminine?"

S: *Euhm, le, le éléphant. Le éléphant gronde.* "Uhm, the, the elephant. The elephant growls."

(multiple errors)

T: *Est-ce qu'on dit le éléphant?* "Do we say the elephant?"

(de Gortari & Tedick, 1998, p. 2).

**5. Elicitation:** It concerns with the methods that teachers use to acquire the correct form out of the student. There are three methods of elicitation: the teacher 1) allows for "fill in the blank," stops and allows the learner to finish the teacher's speech i.e., "No, not

that. It's a . . . ", 2) invites an open question "How do we say X in French?", and 3) requires a reformulation of the incorrect speech (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 48). Elicitation is further illustrated in the example below:

T: OK. Did you like it?

S: Yes, yes, I like it.

T: Yes, I . . . ?

S: Yes, I liked it.

T: Yes, I liked it. (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 575).

**6. Repetition of Errors:** It refers to the teacher's reiteration without connection to the student's incorrect speech. For the most part, teachers adapt their articulation to emphasize the mistake (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 48). For example, the teacher repeats the error below:

S: Le . . . le girafe? (gender error) "The . . . the giraffe?"

T: Le girafe? "The giraffe?"

(de Gortari & Tedick, 1998, p. 2)

Table 1  
*MEAP results*

		Iris Becker	State Average
Reading:	Grade 3	97%	86%
	Grade 4	71%	85%
	Grade 5	86%	82%
Writing:	Grade 3	74%	57%
	Grade 4	45%	45%
	Grade 5	60%	59%
Math:	Grade 3	97%	90%
	Grade 4	93%	86%
	Grade 5	94%	74%

Table 2  
*Ethnicity*

	Iris Becker	State Average
White	99%	70%
African American	<1%	20%

Table 3  
*Eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch*

Iris Becker	State Average
85%	37%

Source: MI Dept. of Education, 2007-2008

In a study by Lyster and Panova (2002) with a database of 1,716 student turns and 1,641 teacher turns the feedback types used were distributed as follows: 1) explicit correction 2%, 2) recasts roughly 77%, 3) clarification requests 11%, 4) metalinguistic feedback or clues 5%, 5) elicitation 4%, and 6) repetition of error 1% (p. 586). Similarly, Scott (2008), a University of Auckland graduate with a double major in English and Linguistics and contributing writer of Suite101.com, an interactive online magazine on 400 subjects for over 10 years wrote, "In a normal one hour lesson, a teacher will approximately use 55% recast feedback, 14% elicitation feedback, 11% clarification feedback, 8% metalinguistic feedback, 7% explicit correction, and 5% repetition feedback."

Lyster and Ranta (1997) reasoned that metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, clarification requests, and repetition allow more learner participation than recasts and explicit correction do (Lyster & Panova, 2002, p. 577). Scott (2008) stated that recasts and explicit correction do not lead to repair because they already provide correct forms to learners.

### Research Methodology

This study includes a classroom observation to determine which types lead to student repair and which types do not lead to student repair. This method was chosen because it offered an opportunity to see first-hand interaction between teachers and students during a regular lesson.

### Student Body

To better understand the student body, their academic strength and social economic status the students': 1) Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) results (scale: % at or above proficient), 2) ethnicity, and 3) eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch is compared to the state average.

### Observation Procedure

During the observation the class was working on the story of *Brothers and Sisters* by Ellen B. Senisi. The teacher discussed the story with the students, walked around the classroom, asked many questions and the students actively participated by raising hands to give answers. Some students participated more than others, but the teacher also asked the students who did not raise their hands to participate. Overall, the class had an active discussion of *Brothers and Sisters* and all students were involved (see table below). The observer sat in the back of the classroom, took notes and recorded the teaching on a cassette player. The students were not bothered nor paid any attention

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to the observer. The teacher had a good classroom management and there was no disciplinary problem. Later in the evening, the recording was transcribed and compared to the notes taken.

Table 4  
*Iris Becker Elementary School Observation*

	feedback types	student response	teacher feedback	context
1	--- (I didn't hear)	xxx (unintelligible)	families helping one another	discussing Brothers and Sisters
2	non-corrective repetition, acknowledgement	pictures of brothers and sisters	you see pictures of brothers, yes	discussing what is in the book
3	non-corrective repetition, acknowledgement	they look like they are mad at each other	okay, they look like they're mad at each other	discussing pictures of children who don't seem happy
4	non-corrective repetition, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback/clues	they look like they are having fun	they look like they are having fun, what are they doing	discussing various pictures where the children play together
5	clarification requests	it looks like it's the mom	how can you tell this is the mom	discussing page 129
6	non-corrective repetition, acknowledgement	they help	they help one another, okay	discussing what brothers and sisters do
7	clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback/clues	her mom is having a baby	how can you tell her mom has a baby	discussing page 130
8	non-corrective repetition, recasts	the same baby is growing older	oh, this is the same baby growing older and older	discussing a baby that gets older
9	recasts	it doesn't matter how old you are, you have to help and share	huh, this is all about sharing and helping	discussing page 133
10	non-corrective repetition	they are different families taking care of one another	uh ha, they are different families	discussing the different families in the book
11	non-corrective repetition, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback/clues	they go from newborn, to a toddler to teenager	wow, they grow from newborn, to a toddler to teenager, what's a newborn	discussing the different stages of a person's life

	feedback types	student response	teacher feedback	context
12	recasts	it's a baby that just born or couple of days old	so well say just to about probably to six weeks	describing the term "newborn"
13	clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback/clues	it's a timeline	why are we using a timeline	teacher and para-professionals put a timeline on the board with pictures of people from newborn to senior citizens
14	recasts, metalinguistic feedback/clues	it showing from baby and what happens	it's showing a chronology of age from how we go from newborn until we get older	discussing the timeline of a person's life
15	non-corrective repetition	photos	they're photographs	talking about the types of pictures in the book
16	recasts, acknowledgement	I think they are real	alright, the pictures are of real people	discussing the types of photographs
17	recasts	true narratives about a lot of things	these are just vignettes of lots of things	talking about the different families in the photos
18	elicitation	people get mad but not forever	so do you think we are talking about the same persons, sometimes they don't get along, but you are not mad forever, because you are families	discussing how some families get mad at each other
19	recasts, elicitation	you take care of brothers and sisters	you should take care of them, now who takes care of whom	discussing the role of brothers and sisters
20	clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback/clues	mom takes care of the baby if he cries	is it only moms job to take care of the baby	discussing the role of brothers and sisters
21	recasts	sometimes brothers and sisters	sometimes it's the job of brothers and sisters or	discussing the role of brothers and sisters
22	acknowledgement	dads	okay	
23	non-corrective repetition	the older takes care of the younger	the older takes care of the younger	discussing the role of brothers and sisters
24	clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback/clues	twins mean they are alike	what do you mean alike, how are they alike, in which way	discussing the meaning of the word twin

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	feedback types	student response	teacher feedback	context
25	recasts	same hair	they have the same hair cut	discussing similarities of twins
26	recasts	they are born at the same time	born at the same time, when you are twins you are born at the same time, you don't have the same hair color, but if they look alike they are identical twins	discussing that identical twins are born at the same time
27	explicit correction	but they don't do the same things	no, they don't have to do the same things	discussing that identical twins don't have to do the same things
28	recasts	I have friends, they are identical twins and I can't tell them apart	it's hard to tell identical twins apart	discussing how identical twins look similar
29	acknowledgement	they can have different hair cuts	that's one way	discussing how to distinguish identical twins
30	acknowledgement	have name tags	that's an idea	discussing how to distinguish identical twins
31	acknowledgement	have different clothes	that would help	discussing how to distinguish identical twins
32	recasts	bracelets	oh name bracelets	discussing how to distinguish identical twins
33	recasts	birthmarks	oh, birthmarks, even though they are twins some of them may have birthmarks and some of them may not, but unless it is visible on the face or something	discussing how to distinguish identical twins
34	non-corrective repetition, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback/clues	adopted	adopted, I was hoping someone would pick up this word, what does it mean	discussing adopted children
35	recasts	my mom has this baby, she took it to the foster house and someone came and took the baby	so they adopted the baby, they make it their own	discussing adopted children

	feedback types	student response	teacher feedback	context
36	recasts	you can't get a baby then you adopt	yeah, there are a lot of reasons why people adopt a baby, some people can't have a baby or some people would like to have more babies then they decide to adopt, most of the times people can't have babies and would love to have a baby, there are lots of people who are orphans, who don't have a home because their pass away or whatever, they need a home	discussing adopted children
37	acknowledgement, clarification requests, elicitation	if you're adopted and people ask if you are brother and sister you say yeah	yeah, but legally what does the word become, are you born from the same mom and dad	discussing adoption
38	clarification requests	how do they fit	what do you mean	
39	clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback	how do they fit in the house	which house, the orphanage, it's usually a huge place and they can take a lot of them	discussing orphanage
40	clarification requests	unintelligible	these are adopted how can you tell	
41	acknowledgement, non-corrective repetition	it's under the picture	right, it's under the picture	noticing the wording under the pictures
42	explicit correction	can a child go where he wants to go	no, if the child is not an adult, it's up to the agency and the people involved only when you are an adult, this is when you are 18 and older can you say where you want to go, that is an interesting question	discussing a child's legal rights
43	elicitation	newborn	what kind of a word is that, thinking grammar	discussing vocabulary
44	clarification requests	a compound word	compound word, why is this a compound word	discussing grammar
45	metalinguistic feedback	more than one word	it has "new" and "born" put together	discussing grammar

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	feedback types	student response	teacher feedback	context
46	explicit correction, elicitation	a toddler	a toddler is a bit older, what comes after a newborn	discussing age chronology
47	metalinguistic feedback, elicitation	the baby	how old do you think is a baby, a baby goes about six weeks to a year and a half, 6–8 months	discussing age chronology
48	non-corrective repetition	to make them laugh	to make them laugh	discussing how it is fun to have a baby
49	acknowledgement, recasts	you can grab them and hug them	right you can hug them, but you have to be gentle and careful	discussing how it is fun to have a baby
50	clarification requests	she pays attention to the baby	does that mean she loves you less	discussing how a mother spend more time with the baby
51	non-corrective repetition, clarification requests	they're wearing different bracelets	oh they are wearing different bracelets, why do you think that they are wearing different bracelets	discussing page 135
52	metalinguistic feedback	younger	oh, the older takes care of the younger, that's not old, older like you having a younger brother or sister	discussing the younger and older person
53	non-corrective repetition, elicitation	the big sister is taking care of the little sister	taking care of the little sister, how old do you think the sister is, what age	discussing the role of brothers and sisters
54	recasts	it's hard to be younger because your bigger sister can do more things	so this is about younger and older	discussing the younger and older person
55	clarification requests	it's like a bumblebee	does it mean that he is like an animal	trying to get the meaning of the word "pest"
56	non-corrective repetition	it's like bothering him	yes, it's annoying, he bothers him, he bothers him	discussing the problems with brother and sisters
57	non-corrective repetition	she's mean with me	mean with you	talk about a child whose sister annoys him
58	non-corrective repetition, recast	fight	they fight, they argue, they get mad at one another	discuss how even adults fight

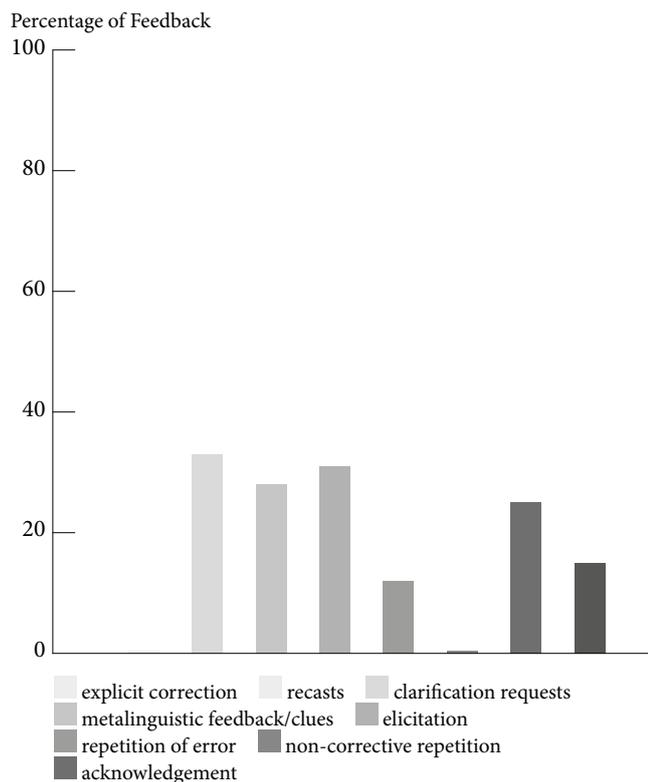


Figure 1. 58 Teacher Corrective Oral Feedback.  
 Note: Explicit correction has 0.05 % and is too small to show up on the graph.

### Results

Some types of feedback were classified as *acknowledgement*, where the teacher acknowledges what the student has said and as *non-corrective repetition*, where the teacher simply repeated what was correctly stated (Gibbons, 2006, p. 52). Some of the feedback falls into more than one category i.e., number 6 is both *non-corrective repetition* and *acknowledgement*. It was considered whether to categorize some feedback as *elaboration*, where according to Gibbons, the student is encouraged to go into detail with what he/she has said, but it was decided not to because they could fall more into the category of clarification requests.

The findings from the data show that there were 58 teacher oral feedback points in approximately one hour of observation, equaling to almost 1 feedback point per minute. The breakdown of the types of feedback is as follows (see Figure 1 above): 3 explicit correction, 20 recasts, 16 clarification requests, 18 metalinguistic feedback or clues, 7 elicitation (all were “invite an open question method” and none were “fill in the blank” or “requires a reformulation of the incorrect speech”), 0 repetition of error, 15 non-corrective repetition and 11 acknowledgement. Although there were only 58 feedback points produced by the teacher, the breakdown shows 90 feedback points because some

feedback was classified as more than one category. There were similarities between these findings and that of previous research (e.g., Lyster and Panova, 2002; Scott, 2008; Esmaeili, 2014), namely, recasts made up the highest percentage with 34%.

### Limitation

The data collection was limited to one observation with one teacher in one classroom, thus making it impossible to draw a conclusion to the second and third research questions: what kinds of corrective oral feedback lead to student repair and what kinds of corrective oral feedback do not lead to student repair. The corrective oral feedback in this classroom was made regarding content, not language. Therefore, to compare these data with the data of previous research where the data were collected from language classes would be problematic.

### Discussion

It would be valuable to replicate and expand this study in a longitudinal research. Longitudinal research is necessary to see the consistency of the corrective oral feedback. Lightbown (2000) stated that to verify the success of CF in learners’ interlanguage progress, researchers need to display that any effect is durable (Sheen, 2004, p. 266). This research could be expanded to include observations in schools with higher social economic status and with various student populations. Previous CF studies have not been investigated in the real school context, but rather in the context of a laboratory setting with NS-NNS dyads, for example, Carroll and Swain (1993), Leeman (2003), Long et al. (1998) which is unlike a classroom setting (Sheen, 2004, pp. 267–268). Such research could help to understand whether these findings are typical of classroom feedback or if they are similar to other classroom teacher feedback regardless of the social economic status and racial background.

The findings of this research on teacher corrective oral feedback are only a scratch of the surface and we are still far from comprehension of how feedback plays a role in the L2 learning process (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994, p. 466).

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