A Case Study of Two Native English Teachers' Corrective Feedback Behaviors
in Foreign Language Classrooms

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Abstract

This observational study investigated corrective feedback techniques of foreign language teachers. Two English as a foreign language classes of 62 high school learners taught by two male teachers in Kanagawa prefecture, Japan, were observed in order to compare the frequency of corrective feedback, preferred corrective techniques, and prioritized error type. A total of approximately 12 hours of continuous classroom interaction was observed and recorded. In terms of the preferred corrective feedback technique, both teachers showed similar results. In contrast, in terms of the frequency of corrective feedback and prioritized error type, the teachers showed different tendencies. The results of this study indicate that differences between individual teachers may affect the amount of feedback given and the error types that are prioritized, while other factors, such as learner proficiency level, may affect the corrective feedback technique used. Future studies on classroom interaction should examine the sources of such individual differences in teaching style, including cultural background, knowledge of education, and beliefs.

Keywords: *Second language acquisition, classroom interaction, teaching style, corrective feedback*

Introduction

For several decades, researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) have examined the effectiveness of corrective feedback. The study of corrective feedback was inspired by studies of first language acquisition (e.g., Farrar, 1990; Bohannon & Stanowicz, 1988). Kail and Nelson (1993) revealed

that a specific feedback type produced by parents was associated with more rapid language acquisition. Based on the results of first language acquisition studies, SLA researchers began investigating the role of corrective feedback in the second language (L2) classroom.

Fanselow (1977b), one of the earliest studies to explore teacher behavior in classroom interaction, observed 11 teachers in L2 classes with the aim of determining the corrective techniques used. The results showed that the techniques used varied widely; however, one common technique aiming to correct the students' mistakes could be detected among the teachers. Therefore, the results of the study suggested that teachers would behave differently when they encountered student L2 errors.

Another early study that examined intact L2 classes was Chaudron (1977). Consistent with the findings of Fanselow (1977b), Chaudron's study stated that there were significant differences in corrective feedback techniques observed among the teachers in the study. To observe the reactions of target language speakers to L2 learners' errors, three teachers who taught students in French immersion classes participated in the research. In the teacher-student conversations, the corrective feedback technique of repetition was reported. Thus, Chaudron's research determined that there were common teacher reactions to L2 leaner errors, although a wide diversity could still be observed.

Although earlier studies indicated a wide range of teacher feedback use, Lyster and Ranta (1997) classified it into six categories used by the teachers in the study: explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. In the four classrooms observed, recast was found to be the most commonly used and preferred feedback technique, despite its ineffectiveness at eliciting student-generated repairs. Therefore, this study also found commonalities concerning the feedback used by teachers.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) proposed another important finding: a teacher of advanced level class used recast less often than other teachers. Three teachers who participated in the study relied more on recast, with 68%, 66%, and 60% of their feedback turns being recasts. However, only 39% of the

feedback turns of the teacher in the advanced-level class were recasts. The finding suggests that learner proficiency level affects teacher decisions in selecting the type of feedback used.

Panova and Lyster (2002), in an analysis of corrective feedback, showed that learner proficiency level might affect teacher feedback choices. They examined an adult ESL classroom of 25 students. Although the students were adult language learners, the teacher relied mostly on recast, consistent with the results of Lyster and Ranta (1997). The study showed that the teachers' strong preference of the reformative technique of recast was related to the students' low proficiency level, which might have prevented the teacher from using other types of feedback. Thus, Panova and Lyster (2002) confirmed the findings of Lyster and Ranta (1997).

Ammar and Spada (2006), in a study on the benefits of various feedback types on primary school students, found that the effectiveness of recasts depended on the learners' proficiency levels. Low proficiency learners were found to benefit less from recast than from other types of feedback. Therefore, the study suggested the need for further investigation of the relationship between learner proficiency levels and corrective feedback techniques.

Analysis of the abovementioned studies demonstrates their common findings; however, it is important to investigate the individual differences between teachers, and whether they behave differently according to the proficiency level of their classes. One of the studies that referred to differences among teachers is that of Rubie-Davies (2007). In the study, the author questioned whether teachers' expectations toward the students would affect classroom interactions of teachers. Twelve primary teachers who had significantly high or low expectations of the students' learning were selected. The teachers formed three groups named high-expectation, low-expectation, and average-progress groups and were observed twice in the academic year. Surprisingly, the results showed that the students of the high-expectation and average-progress teachers were provided with more scaffolding in the classes. In addition, it is said that the high-expectation teachers asked more open-ended questions than the other groups, while students of the low-

expectation teachers were asked fewest open-ended questions. According to the analysis of the study, it was suggested that the teacher attitudes toward their students significantly affected the instructions provided in the classes.

Basturkmen et al. (2004) researched the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices of focus on linguistic form in communicative lessons. Three ESL teachers and their adult students participated in the observational study. The results showed some inconsistencies in the teachers' beliefs during the classroom activities and preferred error correction techniques. For example, one of the teachers believed that the students should repair their incorrect utterances by themselves. In contrast to this stated belief, he rarely used corrective techniques that could facilitate learners' self-correction. Moreover, another teacher believed that teacher corrections should be explicit, although he used the most indirect corrective technique, recast, most often during the observations.

However, some consistencies were found between teachers' stated beliefs and prioritized error types in the study. One teacher believed that grammatical errors were the most important and should be corrected. His stated belief was congruent with his practices, so that the results showed his frequent corrections of the learners' grammatical structures. The other teacher stated that pronunciation and vocabulary were important aspects, with pronunciation being the most important. As well as his stated belief, he corrected the errors concerning pronunciation and vocabulary more often than grammar. These results indicated the possibilities that teachers have different beliefs and they may somewhat reflect teachers' behaviors in the classroom.

Loewen (2003) explored frequency of incidental focus on linguistic form and the variation of its occurrence among L2 classrooms. In the study, 12 intact classes, including 12 teachers and 118 adult students in a language school, were observed to investigate teacher-student interactions. The results showed that occurrences of focus on linguistic form episodes significantly differed among the classes. Regarding the teachers' prioritized error types, vocabulary received the most attention overall, although there were variations among the teachers. According to the analysis of the study, overall

the most preferred feedback type used by the teachers was recast, even though some teachers used feedback that elicited language more directly from the students. In the results, the amount of student uptake was generally high, although there were statistical differences among the classes. For example, successful uptake occurred more in one class than the other two. To summarize, due to the differences in individual classes, variations need to be taken into account when studying teacher use of corrective feedback.

Because of the differences of teachers' behaviors among intact classrooms, it is important to look into each class individually and to compare the differences between the classes. Hence, this study compares two teachers instructing their native language in a similar environment and attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Do both teachers provide a similar amount of corrective feedback for the students?
2. Do both teachers use the same corrective techniques during the class activities?
3. Do both teachers prioritize the same error type?

Method

Participants

The data in this study were collected from two English oral-communication classrooms in Yokohama prefecture, Japan. The proceedings of two English classes (Class A and Class B) were audio-recorded, amounting to nearly 12 hours of data; each English lesson lasted 50 minutes and 14 lessons (seven from each class) were recorded in total. English learners in both classes were first-year high school students. Both were advanced-level classes. Class A was recorded from September to November 2011 and Class B was recorded from September to November 2007. The students were assigned to the advanced courses according to the results of entrance examinations completed in March of these years. The number of students was 37 in Class A and 25 in Class B.

In general, students in Japan officially start learning English in junior high school, so the learners involved in this study had studied English for

at least three years prior. The classes observed in this study were oral-communication lessons, although the classes used a textbook with target sentences for students. Thus, unlike general oral-communication classes conducted in other countries, the students had to focus not only on the content but also on the specific linguistic features. The oral-communication classes were held twice a week in each course, but the students attended other English classes (e.g., grammar and reading classes) as well.

Two teachers participated in this study: Teacher A from Class A and Teacher B from Class B. Both teachers were male, native speakers of English. Teacher A is from England and had been working in the high school for seven years at the time of the study. Before that, he had worked as an English teacher at a language school in Japan. Teacher B, on the other hand, was from Australia and had been teaching the high school students for six months. Teacher B had also worked as an English teacher at a language school before he started working at the high school.

As mentioned above, the two classes were observed in different years, namely 2007 and 2011; however, students in the two classes were taught similarly since the lessons were conducted according to the English curriculum offered by the school. In both classes, students practiced casual, daily conversations.

Error Classifications

In this study, three aspects of classroom instruction were targeted: the students' errors, the teachers' corrective feedback, and the students' reactions to the feedback. First, error classification should be discussed. In previous studies, each study adopted its own system of categorizing learners' errors, although there were some common items, such as grammatical and phonological errors. Moreover, lexical items were also commonly discussed categories. Therefore, in this study, these three error types were adopted, with the addition of one more categorization, "discourse deviation." This was added to cover discourse-level deviations that occur in classroom conversations. For example, in the present study, student utterances considered inappropriate for a given situation or context were categorized as

discourse deviation errors.

To classify corrective feedback, the present study referred to the classification system used by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Lyster and Mori (2006), because the feedback types were clearly defined. They determined six types of teacher feedback: explicit correction, recast, clarification request, meta-linguistic clue, elicitation, and repetition. In addition to their six types, a new type of correction, *compulsion* (see a definition stated below) was used, proposed in Oba (2009). Consequently, in this study, abovementioned seven types of teacher feedback were used. The corrective feedback types are discussed in further detail below.

Explicit Correction. Lyster and Ranta's (1997) study defined explicit correction as referring to "the explicit provision of the correct form. As the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect (e.g., "Oh you mean," "You should say") " (p. 46). For example (an example observed in the current study):

Student: The Yokohama station.

Teacher: You don't have to say "the Yokohama station," just Yokohama station. [Explicit correction]

Student: Ah, yeah? No?

Recast. Lyster and Ranta (1997) explained recast as involving "the teachers' reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error" (p. 46). For example (an example observed in the current study):

S: *Fudousan* (Real estate agent).

T: Real estate agent. [Recast]

S: Real estate.

T: Agent. [Recast]

Clarification Request. Lyster and Ranta (1997) described clarification request as "The teacher uses phrases such as 'Pardon?' and 'I don't understand' after learner errors to indicate to students that their utterance is ill-formed in some way and that a reformulation is required" (p. 271). For example (an example observed in the current study):

S: Ah … I, I played a game.

T: You played what ? [Clarification request]

S: Played a game.
T: Game, game ? TV game ?

Meta-linguistic Clue. Lyster and Ranta (1997) described meta-linguistic clue as containing "either comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the students' utterances, without explicitly providing the correct form" (p. 47). For example (an example observed in the current study):
S: *Demo jyuukuji han no houga iino*? (Well, in English do you say nineteen thirty?)
T: We don't usually say nineteen thirty. [Meta-linguistic clue]
S: *Suuji de iino*? (Is it OK to say the number?)
In the first turn of this example, the learner formulated his question in his first language. The content of his question was how to express 7:30 p.m. in English, because it is possible to say either seven o'clock or nineteen o'clock in Japanese. In the second turn, the teacher gave the student the following information: "We don't usually say nineteen thirty." The teacher narrowed down the student's choices, but the student ultimately did not find the answer to the question.

Elicitation. Lyster and Ranta (1997) illustrated that there are at least three steps in elicitation. First, a teacher pauses to elicit a student's completion of a target utterance. Second, a teacher uses questions to lead the student to correct form. Third, a teacher occasionally asks the student to reformulate his or her utterance. For example (an example observed in the current study):
T: What are you practicing?
S: (pointing on a handout) *Kore* (This).
T: Why?
S: *Yarette iwareta* (Because the teacher told me to do it).
T: Because…? [Elicitation]

Repetition. Repetition refers to the teacher's repetitions of the student's ill-formed utterance. For example (an example observed in the current study):
S: What time do we meet?
T: What time do we meet? [Repetition]
S: Shall we?

T: Should we. [Recast]
S: Should, Should.

Compulsion. When teachers use compulsion, the learners are forced to formulate their ideas or sentences. For example (an example observed in the current study):
T: What do you think? Have a guess. One in three chances. Come on.
S: Can.
T: So, say the sentence. [Compulsion]
S: What can I do for you?

In the present study, the first feedback, explicit correction, was categorized as "explicit type," and the second one, recast, was categorized as "input (providing) type." Finally, the last five techniques were all categorized as "output (eliciting) type," because their role is eliciting a learner output.

Student Reactions

Let us turn now to classifications of students' reactions to teacher feedback. Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Lyster and Mori (2006) classified students' reactions into two divisions: "uptake" and "no uptake." Uptake refers to students' reactions to the aims of the teacher's corrections and no uptake means that students had no reactions toward these corrections. Lyster and Ranta (1997) defined uptake as follows:

> Uptake in our model refers to a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance (this overall intention is clear to the student although the teacher's specific linguistic focus may not be). (p. 49)

According to their studies, uptake has two phases: "repair" and "needs-repair." When a learner can correct his or her previous erroneous utterance after the teacher's feedback, it is called "repair." On the other hand, "needs-repair" means that a learner cannot correct his or her previous erroneous utterance even though he or she has received the corrective feedback. The definition of repair provided by Lyster and Ranta (1997) is "the correct reformulation of an error as uttered in a single student turn and not to the sequence of turns

resulting in the correct reformulation; nor does it refer to self-initiated repair" (p. 49). According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), repair includes the student's (1) repetition, (2) incorporation, (3) peer-repair, and (4) self-repair; however, in the current study, types (2) and (3) were excluded because the definition of (2) was too ambiguous to use in practical research and (3) did not occur in the current study. The following is an example of repetition:

S: I'm calling again later.
T: I'll call again later.
S: I ?
T: I'll.
S: I'll call later. [Repair-repetition]

In the first line, the student made the grammatical error, confusing the present progressive form with the future tense auxiliary. The teacher provided the future-tense sentence, but the student could not hear what the teacher had said (Japanese students sometimes cannot hear a contracted form of an auxiliary verb). In the fourth line, the teacher pronounced what the student could not hear, the contracted form of the future auxiliary "will." Finally, in the last line, the student repeated the correct sentence provided by the teacher. According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), "Self-repair refers to a self-correction, produced by the student who made the initial error, in response to the teacher's feedback when the latter does not already provide the correct form" (p. 50). An example of self-repair is as follows:

S: How about going to go shopping?
T: Don't say going to go shopping, going shopping.
S: Ah. [Needs repair]

In the first line of the example above, the student's utterance of the infinitive verb, "to go," was redundant, so the teacher corrected it in the second line. In the final line, the student showed acknowledgement but did not utter a corrected form. Lyster and Ranta (1997) also described subcategories of needs-repair, but there was no need to classify this phase for the purpose of the current study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the following procedures were followed. First, audio-recorded materials were transcribed into written materials by the author. Then, only the teacher-student conversations including all three relevant aspects (student errors, teacher corrective feedback, and student reactions) were examined. Teacher-student conversations that did not contain corrective feedback were excluded from the analysis. Those three parts were then categorized according to the classification illustrated above. To see if the author's classifications were appropriate, a second rater also classified 20% of the teacher-student conversations. Inter-rater agreement was more than 90%, thus confirming the appropriateness of the analysis. Finally, the frequencies of student errors, teacher feedback, and student reactions were counted.

Results

The total amounts of corrections made by each teacher are displayed in Table 1. The two teachers taught students of the same age with the same level of English proficiency; however, Teacher A corrected the learners' errors more frequently than Teacher B (223 vs. 168).

Table 1

Frequency of Teacher Feedback

Teacher A	Teacher B
223	168

Table 2 displays the correction types used by the teachers based on 100 randomly selected samples from Class A and Class B. For both teachers, the most frequent category was input type, which was recorded 79 times in Class

A and 70 in Class B. The category of explicit type was recorded 17 times in Class A and 14 times in Class B, while the category of output type was recorded just 4 times in Class A and 16 times in Class B.

Table 2

Distribution of Feedback Types

	Teacher A	Teacher B
Input type (recasts)	79	70
Output type	4	16
Explicit type (explicit corrections)	17	14
Total	100	100

Tables 3 and 4 illustrate, respectively, the most frequent types of errors corrected by Teacher A and Teacher B. Teacher A showed the strongest preference for phonological errors, followed in decreasing frequency by: discourse deviation, lexical errors, and grammatical errors. Unlike Teacher A, Teacher B had a stronger tendency to correct the learners' discourse deviation errors, and corrected all types of errors, in contrast with Teacher A. The following error types were corrected by Teacher B in decreasing frequency: lexical, grammatical, and phonological errors. Tables 3 and 4 thus show that the two teachers had different priorities in their error correction.

Table 3

Distribution of Error Types (Teacher A)

	Phonological	Lexical	Grammatical	Discourse deviation
Feedback frequency	70	3	1	26

Table 4

Distribution of Error Types (Teacher B)

	Phonological	Lexical	Grammatical	Discourse deviation
Feedback frequency	14	16	15	55

Discussions

The present study aimed to seek the answer for the research questions displayed previously. In particular, the study focused on three phases, which were the frequencies of feedback that occurred in the classes, the distributions of feedback types used by the teachers, and the distributions of prioritized error types between the teachers.

Corrective feedback occurred in both classes; however, the frequencies of feedback provided by each teacher were different, with 223 corrections for Teacher A and 168 corrections for Teacher B, even though both classes were the same in terms of English proficiency. The diversities of feedback occurrences were also mentioned in Lyster and Ranta (1997). They reported that the amounts of feedback provided by four teachers displayed wide ranges. In addition to this study, Loewen (2003) also found that the occurrences of focus on form in their 12 classes varied. According to some previous studies, it is natural to think that occurrence of teacher feedback would differ; however, it is important to remember the students in both classes observed for the present study had the same proficiency levels. The question is why did Teacher A correct more learner errors than Teacher B? One interpretation could be that Teacher A tended to correct the pronunciation errors made by his students, while the other teacher corrected the students' discourse deviations the most. In the current study, the students were foreign language learners of English, so that the students took some time to pronounce new vocabulary and the teacher corrected them repeatedly until they succeeded. Consequently, the learner pronunciation errors caused more teacher feedback than the other types of learner errors.

With respect to the distributions of feedback types used by the teachers, both of them preferred using the input type of recast to the other types. Not surprisingly, many previous studies revealed that the most common corrective technique in their studies was recast. One explanation for this was given by Panova and Lyster (2002). Because the learners in their study were at a low proficiency level, the teachers relied more on recasts than other feedback types that require greater learner participation. They concluded that the students' low proficiency level might have affected the teachers' feedback choices. Another explanation for teachers' strong preferences for recast was mentioned in the study of Basturkmen et al. (2004). They found that there were some inconsistencies between the teachers' stated beliefs and their actual performances during classroom activities. For instance, one of the teachers in their study emphasized that self-correction was the best form of error correction, even though he rarely used techniques that elicited

self-correction. In addition, this tendency was also observed in other teachers as well. This finding was interpreted as something that might disappear with experience, because the least experienced teacher had the highest inconsistency between his stated beliefs and actual performance. In the present study, students were learning English as a foreign language in Japan, and they had limited input of English in their daily lives. In such cases, the learner immaturities did not allow the teachers to use a variety of feedback techniques as Panova and Lyster (2002) also mentioned in their study; however, in the present study, Basturkmen et al.'s (2004) interpretation could not be confirmed. In the present study, the lesser experienced teacher elicited more self-corrections than the more experienced teacher, who relied more on recast and explicit correction. It should be taken into account that teachers also need to be aware of feedback techniques that can lead to more learner self-corrections.

Concerning the teachers' prioritized error types, there were apparent differences between the teachers. A strong preference for pronunciation errors could be seen in the class of Teacher A. The reason for this likely relates to the teacher's personal beliefs: the teacher had stated that English pronunciation is difficult to master, so younger English learners who are more sensitive toward English sounds should practice pronunciation more. In contrast, Teacher B preferred to correct the student errors relating to the contents of the discourses, which is discourse deviation. Additionally, Teacher B prioritized correcting student utterances of English for appropriate manners, especially politeness. Moreover, he disliked the students speaking one or two words only, making the students construct whole sentences. This is because replying with only a few words could be regarded as a rude or unsociable behavior. For instance, we speak formally when we meet a person in business or in a superior position, and it is regarded as impolite if we use casual language with them. Moreover, if a person is speaking in an inappropriate manner, the listener may feel uncomfortable with the conversation. Thus, teacher B might have believed that speaking English in an appropriate manner was an important communication skill for his students.

Conclusion

The present study conducted research based on the following research questions: 1) Do both teachers provide a similar amount of correction toward the students, 2) Do both teachers use the same corrective techniques during class activities, and 3) Do both teachers tend to correct the same error type. With respect to research question one, the two teachers in the present study provided different amounts of the corrective feedback, even though the teachers were teaching learners of the same proficiency level. As for research question two, both teachers showed a similar tendency to prefer the use of recast, rather than the other corrective techniques. Because the learners in the present study were immature in their abilities of foreign language, the teachers limited the use of different corrective feedback during the classes. With respect to research question three, one teacher had a strong preference toward correcting pronunciation errors, while the other teacher corrected errors relating to the contents of the discourses most often. Since the teachers had different priorities toward learner error types, teacher beliefs should be taken into accounts when observing feedback techniques in the classroom. Overall, the teachers in the present study shared a common tendency concerning corrective feedback techniques. On the contrary, regarding the frequency of corrections and error type priority, the teachers showed differences. This means that in certain aspects, teachers' individualities could be easily observed. These individualities might come from the teachers' cultural backgrounds, knowledge of education, and beliefs. Thus, the current study suggested that particularly for certain aspects, teacher individualities might affect results of classroom observations.

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