

## ***Feedback and Uptake in Chinese EFL Classrooms: In Search of Instructional Variables***

**Yingli Yang**

*University of International Business and Economics, China*

In second language research, a substantial body of research has demonstrated the facilitative role of corrective feedback in second language development (Chaudron, 1988; DeKeyser, 1998; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Spada, 1997). A number of empirical studies conducted in different settings revealed that context may affect the extent to which different kinds of feedback are noticed and incorporated in subsequent speech by learners. This paper reports an observational study conducted in Chinese EFL classes. Lyster and Mori's (2006) feedback coding scheme was adopted in documenting the frequency of teachers' feedback moves and learner uptake rate following feedback. The findings show that the distribution of prompts and recasts was in reverse order compared to other communicative second language contexts. Findings also reveal that explicit correction and prompts had a higher uptake rate than recasts, which was in tandem with previous findings. These results suggest that form-oriented Chinese foreign language context indeed mediates the pattern of feedback and uptake.

**Key words: feedback, communicative orientation, uptake, classroom contexts**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Empirical classroom studies in second language research have well

documented the role of corrective feedback in second language acquisition. Spada (1997) classified corrective feedback as ‘reactive’ as opposed to ‘preemptive’ form-focused instruction. Many studies on corrective feedback have reported the beneficial effects of corrective feedback for second language acquisition (e.g., Tomasello & Herron, 1988, 1989; also see the meta-analysis by Russell and Spada, 2006).

In two classroom studies, Tomasello and Herron (1988, 1989) investigated the effects of feedback provided during teacher-led drills using the garden path technique. They found that teacher feedback enabled learners to engage in cognitive comparison between their own erroneous utterance and the target grammatical structure. Russell and Spada (2006) synthesized more recent findings obtained from both descriptive and experimental studies on oral and written feedback, and concluded that corrective feedback is effective both in learners’ oral and written performance in general. Moreover, the effect of corrective feedback is considerable and long-lasting.

If feedback is in fact facilitative in second language acquisition, the next question we seek to answer is whether certain types of feedback are more effective than other types. Earlier work on corrective feedback, including Chaudron’s study (1977) in French immersion classrooms, has shown that not all feedback is noticed and incorporated by learners in the classroom. The distinction referred to thereafter draws on Lyster and Mori’s (2006) classification of feedback — explicit correction, recasts, and prompts. While the former two types of feedback provide learners with the correct form, the latter provides various cues for learners to retrieve the target form themselves.

Motivated by both theoretical and practical issues (Ellis & Sheen, 2006), the effectiveness of recasts compared with other types of feedback has especially drawn researchers’ attention during the past three decades. Numerous studies in different contexts have shown mixed results pertaining to the relative effect of recasts compared with other feedback techniques.

## THE ISSUE OF CONTEXT IN FEEDBACK STUDIES

Sheen (2004) reviewed descriptive classroom feedback studies in four different contexts (ESL in New Zealand, ESL in Canada, French Immersion, EFL in Korea) and found that in more meaning- or content-oriented contexts, such as ESL in Canada (Panova & Lyster, 2002) and French immersion (Lyster & Ranta, 1997), compared with prompts, recasts were less likely to elicit repair and uptake; whereas in more form-oriented contexts, such as ESL in New Zealand (Ellis, Basturkman, & Loewen, 2001), or EFL in Korea (Sheen, 2004), recasts were equally effective at inviting uptake and repair.

Seedhouse (1997) examined the relationship between pedagogy and interaction by analyzing numerous extracts from second language classrooms. In what he termed as “form-and-accuracy” context, he found that despite teachers’ intentions of avoiding direct and overt negative evaluation of learners’ linguistic errors, this action actually marked linguistic errors as embarrassing and problematic. He suggested that pedagogy and the organization of repair should work in tandem to achieve the purpose of second language education. In another article (Seedhouse, 2004), he proposed a “variable” approach to repair in the L2 classroom, arguing that there is “no single, monolithic organization of repair in the L2 classroom. There is a reflexive relationship between the pedagogical focus and the organization of repair” (p. 142).

Lyster and Mori (2006) compared teacher-student interaction in two different instructional settings at the elementary school level (18.3 hours in French immersion and 14.8 hours in Japanese immersion). In their study, the immediate effects of explicit correction, recasts, and prompts (namely, rate of uptake following feedback) were investigated. The results showed a higher rate of student uptake and repair following recasts in Japanese immersion settings, whereas a larger proportion of repair resulting from prompts was revealed in French immersion settings. Using the Communicative Orientation to Language Teaching coding scheme (COLT), (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995), Lyster and Mori detected that Japanese immersion was characterized by an

analytic orientation, which may have primed learners' attention to form. Based on their findings and results from other previous studies, Lyster and Mori (2006) put forward the Counterbalance Hypothesis:

Instructional activities and interactional feedback that act as a counterbalance to the predominant communicative orientation of a given classroom setting will be more facilitative of interlanguage restructuring than instructional activities and interactional feedback that are congruent with the predominant communicative orientation. (p. 294)

These results lend support to the argument that the saliency and efficacy of feedback may vary across different instructional settings, highlighting the importance of distinguishing implicit and explicit feedback based on the discourse context (Ellis & Sheen, 2006). Research into the patterns and effects of corrective feedback in foreign language context in comparison with communicative or content-based second language classrooms may provide empirical evidence for this argument.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The previously mentioned studies showed that feedback patterns and effectiveness in some foreign language contexts differ from those in immersion and other communicative classrooms (e.g., Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002). However, research into corrective feedback in foreign language settings is still very limited. The results of the few studies need to be borne out by more research in such settings with participants of various age groups, language proficiency levels, and other individual characteristics.

The aim of the present study is to increase our knowledge of the impact of contextual variables, especially instructional focus, may have on the frequency and type of teacher feedback and the students' response in Chinese EFL context. Specifically, the research questions are outlined as follows:

1. According to the COLT analysis, what are the characteristics of Chinese EFL classrooms and how may these instructional variables influence patterns of feedback and uptake in such a context?
2. What are the patterns and characteristics of interactional feedback and uptake in Chinese secondary EFL classrooms and in which way do they resemble or differ from those observed in other contexts?

## **METHOD**

### **Definition and Terminology**

The present study investigates forms and characteristics of feedback and uptake in a specific context, namely, Chinese secondary school EFL classrooms. Feedback and uptake categories were based on Lyster and Mori's (2006) coding scheme. Feedback moves were classified as one of three types: explicit correction, recasts, or prompts. Explicit correction and recasts provide learners with the correct form, whereas prompts withhold the target form and instead offer learners various cues to revise their erroneous utterances themselves. The difference between explicit correction and recasts is that by offering explicit correction, the teacher clearly indicates that the student's utterance is wrong and provides the correct form; whereas by recasting, the teacher implicitly reformulates part or all of the student's utterance during the natural flow of a conversation. According to Lyster and Mori (2006), prompts are pragmatically different from explicit correction and recasts in that "By prompting, a teacher provides cues for learners to draw on their own resources to self-repair, whereas by providing explicit correction or recasting, a teacher both initiates and completes a repair within a single move" (p. 272). Examples of the three types of feedback are as follows<sup>1</sup>:

---

<sup>1</sup> All these examples were taken from data in the present study.

Explicit Correction

(1) S: Be eager in.

T: **Be eager in? Be engaged in**, right?

S: Ah!

T: Be engaged in.

Recast

(2) T: Hi, Ilva. Let me see. Do you know what's this in English?

S: It's a right.

T: It's a **light**. (slowly)

S: Uh, it's a light.

Prompt

(3) S: advices.

T: **advices?** (With rising intonation)

S: suggestions.

T: Yes, suggestions. Actually, advice is uncountable. Sit down, please.

Uptake was defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997) as a student's immediate response to the teacher's feedback that "constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance" (p. 49). Uptake includes both (a) needs-repair and (b) repair. Some scholars question the effectiveness of uptake and repair in signifying learning (Mackey & Philp, 1998; Ohta, 2000); however, a series of recent studies have shown a positive relationship between uptake and acquisition as manifested by post-test scores. Loewen (2002) investigated the effectiveness of focus-on-form on second language learning in communicative ESL classrooms in New Zealand. Among a range of focus-on-form characteristics, "successful uptake" (repair) following corrective feedback was significantly related to improvement in post-test scores. Havranek and Cesnik (2001) found that recasts not eliciting immediate repetition by learners were the least effective type of feedback in EFL classrooms, as shown in the post-tests. McDonough

(2005) studied the acquisition of question-formation among Thai EFL learners and found that self-repair moves that followed prompts in the form of clarification requests were significant predictors of L2 development. Loewen (2005) found that uptake in the form of repetition of recasts was associated with subsequent learning in adult ESL classroom settings. The relationship between uptake and second language learning still needs to be supported by more empirical evidence; however, the aforementioned studies have shown that at least uptake can be used both as a legitimate measure of learner's noticing of feedback and as a potential indicator of subsequent learning.

### **Participants and Context**

This study analyzes interactional feedback and uptake that occurred during approximately 6 hours of classroom interaction recorded in three Chinese secondary EFL classrooms. The teachers in the Chinese EFL context participating in the study were aware that the researcher was interested in classroom interaction, but were unaware of the specific research focus of the study. The teachers continued with their normal classroom teaching while the researcher was videotaping their interactions with the students. Video-recordings of classroom interaction were then transcribed and analyzed using Lyster & Mori's (2006) coding scheme for feedback and uptake. The researcher also analyzed video-recordings afterwards using the COLT coding scheme (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995) Part A for the purpose of identifying instructional characteristics in the three EFL classrooms.

Data were gathered from three different secondary classrooms. Specifically, one was in Junior Grade One, one in Senior Grade Two, and one in Senior Grade Three. All of the three classes were offered in the same school. This school was a provincial key middle school located in the northern part of China. The textbook and curriculum were based on the communicative approach and English as the medium of instruction. All three teachers were female. One had over ten years of teaching experience and had studied

abroad for one year. The other two had five years of teaching experience and had never studied abroad. They were all native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and had formal training as English teachers at the university level. Their class sizes were over sixty. In the two senior classes, most of the students had begun formal English instruction in Junior Grade One.

In the junior class, most students started their English instruction in primary Grade Four. All of the students participating in the study shared the same L1, which was Mandarin Chinese. The students had five hours of instruction of English language per week. They seldom had the opportunity to listen to and speak English outside the classroom. The medium of instruction was mainly English. Classroom activities included reading, vocabulary learning, listening, and speaking. All three classrooms were equipped with multimedia instruments. Although the curriculum was based on the communicative approach, all of the teachers reported that they had a heavy workload and the pressure of national exams was very demanding.

### **Coding Schemes**

Two coding schemes were employed for the analysis of the present study. One was adapted from Lyster and Ranta's (1997) error treatment sequence; the other was the COLT (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995) Part A for quantifying instructional orientation of the classrooms.

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), the error treatment sequence begins with a learner's ill-formed utterance, which contains one or more errors, be they grammatical, phonological, or lexical. The erroneous utterance is either followed by teacher feedback or topic continuation. Feedback moves can be then followed either by topic continuation or learner uptake. Uptake includes either repair or needs repair. Different from data presented by Lyster and Mori (2006), repairs in the present study were followed by either of the following two possibilities: topic continuation or teacher's reinforcement of the target form (In their article, uptake moves in the form of repair were followed by only topic continuation).



Error treatment sequences that occurred in Chinese EFL classrooms were identified in the transcripts and coded according to the above coding categories by the researcher, who is a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese and near-native speaker of English. Quantification of the data was mainly done manually because of the small size of the dataset.

The other coding scheme adopted for identifying the communicative orientation of the classrooms in the present study was the COLT observation and coding scheme (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995). This coding scheme was used (a) to describe some of the instructional variables in the Chinese foreign language classroom and (b) to examine how differences in instruction in foreign language and immersion settings contribute to patterns of feedback and uptake in the respective contexts. The COLT observation and coding scheme has been developed as a tool for observing L2 classrooms and identifying the characteristics of communicative orientation of the classrooms. This scheme has been used or adapted in a variety of contexts including English as a second language in Canada, French as a second language, English as a foreign language in Japan, English as a foreign language in Greece as well as in various other contexts (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995). Only Part A of the scheme was adopted in the present study to code and quantify the observed pedagogical activities and procedures. Part A includes five major categories: participant organization, content, content control, student modality, materials (type and source). More details of the coding conventions can be found in the coding manual by Spada and Fröhlich (1995). Some minor adaptations were made according to Lyster and Mori (2006) for the comparison of the data.

## **RESULTS**

### **COLT Analysis**

The quantification of the COLT analysis revealed the communicative

orientation of the three Chinese EFL classes. The percentages reported in the following tables were obtained by counting the total of each individual activity in all three classes divided by the total number of teaching hours (5 in the present study). As shown in Table 1, in the present context, whole class activities constitute over 80% of total class time, whereas individual or group work made up a relatively smaller proportion (less than 20%). This result is not surprising given the presence of over 60 students per class. Fifteen percent of the time students were engaged in certain kinds of choral activities (reading aloud or answering questions in chorus), which have been identified in Lyster and Mori (2006) as a form-focused activity that distinguishes French immersion from Japanese immersion settings in their study. Group work, which characterizes activities in communicative classrooms, comprised only 2% of total class time. Although individual work accounts for 17% in Chinese EFL, examination of video-recordings revealed that most of the individual tasks in Chinese EFL involved reading aloud new words, which constitutes a characteristic of form-focused instruction (i.e., rote memorization and repetition).

**TABLE 1**  
**Participant Organization (Percentage Distribution of Total Time)**

Activity	Chinese EFL
Whole class	
Teacher-led	61%
Student-led	5%
Choral	15%
Individual	17%
Group	2%

Table 2 reveals the content focus of the classes in the three settings. According to Lyster & Mori (2006), content focus is divided into procedural, language, thematic, or combinations of two or more foci. Pertaining to content focus, it appears that Chinese EFL classes demonstrated a clear focus on language and form instead of content. In Chinese EFL classrooms, the overriding focus on language accounted for 80% of total class time.

Furthermore, there were few combinations of various content foci in Chinese EFL classrooms. In the Chinese EFL situation, teachers tend to deal with language forms exclusively, without integrating language within communicative activities. Therefore, it seems likely that Chinese EFL classrooms encourage learners to focus their attention “on specific properties of the linguistic code” with few “contrived meaning-focused activities designed to promote authentic communication in the classroom” (Ellis, 1990, p. 14) which characterize various content-focused or communicative classrooms.

**TABLE 2**  
**Content Focus (Percentage Distribution of Total Time)**

Content focus	Chinese EFL
Procedural	2%
Language	80%
Thematic	11%
Combinations	
Management +Theme	1%
Language + Theme	3%
Management+ Language	3%

As shown in Table 3, in Chinese EFL, teacher/text accounts for the highest proportion of content control (90% of total class time). Students have very little control over the content of the classes (student content control accounting for only 10%). This distribution certainly reveals a pre-planned curriculum in which the teacher dominates the majority of the class time; however, this kind of intervention may deprive students of the opportunity to interact with the teacher to a large extent (Ellis, 1990).

**TABLE 3**  
**Content Control (Percentage Distribution of Total Time)**

Content control	Chinese EFL
Teacher/text	90%
Teacher/text/student	10%
Students	0%

Table 4 displays the modality of classroom activities. In Chinese EFL classrooms, listening activities, which include listening to teacher-talk, listening to fellow students and listening exercises, constituted the major form of student modality, accounting for 60% of total time. Post-hoc analysis of the classroom transcripts revealed that major listening activities involved listening to teacher-talk, which again is a typical activity of form-oriented or analytic classrooms. Combinations of two or more activity types in Chinese EFL (18%) were rarer than those observed in immersion contexts (Lyster & Mori, 2006) (49% in French immersion and 37% in Japanese immersion). Video-recordings also reveal that teachers in Chinese EFL seemed to organize classroom activities in a single modality sequentially instead of integrating the four skills into one activity.

**TABLE 4**  
**Student Modality (Percentage Distribution of Total Time)**

Student Modality	Chinese EFL
Listening	60%
Speaking	5%
Reading	15%
Writing	2%
Combinations	18%

Table 5 reveals the material types used in Chinese EFL classrooms. Chinese EFL teachers seemed to rely on material heavily during their instruction, since 97% of the time, Chinese EFL teachers were using material of some sort. As to the type of material, Chinese EFL teachers used minimal texts (i.e. isolated words, sentences etc.) 50% of the time, and extended material (i.e. longer conversations, discourse) 25% of the time. In the Chinese context, a myriad of material types (such as graphics, videos and audios) were used rarely (17% of the time) and other sorts of material were used 5% of the time.

**TABLE 5**  
**Material Types (Percentage Distribution of Total Time)**

Material Types	Chinese EFL
Minimal	50%
Extended	25%
Combinations	17%
Others	5%
No material	3%

In summary, COLT analysis identified characteristics of form-focused instruction in the Chinese EFL context, which may account for the patterns of feedback and uptake that differ from various communicative or content-based contexts previously reported (Lyster & Mori, 2006; Sheen, 2004).

### **Patterns of Feedback and Uptake**

Table 6 presents the raw number distribution of uptake in relation to feedback types in Chinese EFL classrooms. The dataset contains a total of only 36 feedback moves over 6 hours of classroom interaction, which yields the frequency of 6 feedback moves per hour. This rate appears to be extremely low compared to other settings (e.g., Lyster & Mori, 2006; Panova & Lyster, 2002). However, this low rate of feedback may not necessarily result from the small size of the dataset; instead, it may be due to a number of instructional variables in this particular foreign language context which will be explored further in the discussion section. Nevertheless, the ensuing discussion on feedback and uptake based on the small number of feedback and uptake in the present dataset is inevitably speculative and certainly needs to be borne out by larger scale observations in similar settings.

In the present Chinese EFL context, the distribution of feedback types reveals that prompts (22 in total) were the predominant type of feedback, followed by recasts (11 in total), and explicit correction (3 in total). This finding is strikingly different from a variety of contexts previously reported (Lyster & Mori, 2006; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Sheen, 2004; Tsang, 2004), with the exception of the study conducted by Lohtman (2002) in German as

a foreign language in secondary schools in Belgium, which revealed a similar distribution of feedback types. Data in Lochtman's study revealed that prompts (55.8%) outnumbered recasts (30.5%) and explicit correction (13.7%). In other content-based or communicative contexts, be they immersion, ESL or foreign language classes, recasts were the predominant type of feedback, outnumbering any other type of feedback.

**TABLE 6**  
**Uptake in Relation to Feedback in Chinese EFL (Raw Number Distribution)**

	Prompts	Recasts	Explicit Correction	Total
Uptake				
Repair	21	3	3	27
Needs-repair	1	0	0	1
No Uptake	0	8	0	8
Total	22	11	3	36

Of all 36 feedback moves, 28 of them were followed by uptake and 8 were followed by no uptake. This uptake rate over feedback is higher than the immersion context reported by Lyster and Ranta (1997), but similar to New Zealand ESL (Ellis et. al, 2001) and Korea EFL (Sheen, 2004). In the latter two contexts, the uptake rate was approximately 80%. It is likely that in a context where linguistic forms are emphasized, there is a higher frequency of uptake, whereas in more meaning-oriented contexts, the uptake rate is not as high, as shown by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Panova and Lyster (2002). Out of the total 28 cases of uptake, repair accounts for 27 with only 1 needs-repair. This extremely high rate of repair corresponds to Sheen's (2004) comparison of repair rate in the four communicative classrooms, which demonstrates that in more form-oriented classrooms, the repair rate is substantially higher than the needs repair rate. Overall, the repair rate in form-oriented contexts is higher than in meaning-oriented contexts. However, no previous data revealed a repair rate as high as that of Chinese EFL.

In addition to differences in the distribution of feedback types in the Chinese EFL context in comparison with other contexts, data in Chinese EFL also reveals the differential effects that the three types of feedback have on

eliciting uptake and repair. In this context, explicit correction was highly effective at eliciting uptake, since in 3 out of 3 cases, explicit correction was followed by uptake. Furthermore, the ratio of uptake in the form of repair as opposed to uptake in the form of needs-repair was 2:1. Prompts were also highly effective at inviting uptake and repair, since all prompts were followed by uptake and 21 over 22 cases, uptake after prompts in Chinese EFL was in the form of repair.

It is interesting to note that recasts in the Chinese EFL context seem less effective at eliciting uptake and repair compared to prompts and explicit correction, since only three out of eleven recasts were followed by uptake, all in the form of repair. However, examination of video-recordings revealed that all of the recasts with no uptake were followed by topic-continuation, leaving no opportunity for the students to uptake.

The most striking finding is that in Chinese EFL, recasts led to either repair or no uptake at all, while explicit correction and prompts led to either repair or needs-repair. In other words, recasts elicited less but highly accurate uptake while explicit correction and prompts were extremely effective at inviting uptake.

## **DISCUSSION**

This paper addresses the issue of feedback and uptake in Chinese EFL classrooms to search for the potential instructional variables that may have an impact on the provision of feedback and subsequent learner uptake.

The first question asked what instructional variables, according to the COLT analysis, may contribute to patterns of feedback and uptake in Chinese EFL classrooms. As detected by COLT, classroom activities were mostly teacher-oriented or teacher-directed. Choral activity in Chinese EFL constitutes a substantial proportion of classroom activities. This feature may explain the high proportion of uptake and repair as well as the accuracy of uptake following repair. Another feature that characterized Chinese EFL as a form-

oriented classroom was the prominence of the language focus. Ninety percent of the time the focus of the classes was on language, which is strikingly different from French immersion and Japanese immersion (Lyster & Mori, 2006). Furthermore, little discussion of themes in English as well as passive listening activities together with extensive use of minimal text allowed only limited opportunity for students to interact, which may contribute to the low occurrence of feedback and uptake. Even if there is an opportunity to interact, the fact that most of the questions were display questions followed by short student responses does not allow the teachers to embed error correction within meaningful interactions. In this situation, the corrective nature of recasts may be easily identified. These instructional features displayed in the Chinese EFL classrooms may draw learners' attention exclusively to language code (Ellis, 1990); as a result, students were more aware of the corrective purpose of feedback, irrespective of feedback types.

The second research question addressed the distribution and characteristics of interactional feedback and uptake in the Chinese EFL context as well as the differences and similarities of these patterns compared to those observed in other contexts. Overall, the frequency of feedback in Chinese EFL classrooms was extremely low. There were 6 cases of feedback per hour in Chinese EFL, which was the lowest among all the feedback studies across different settings previously reported (e.g., 16/hr in Korea EFL, Sheen, 2004; 39.4/hr in Belgium, Lochtman, 2002). This could be explained by the dominance of teacher talk which may have deprived the opportunity for student-teacher interaction and therefore the chances for corrective feedback and uptake. For example, Tsang (2004) has argued that the lockstep, Initiate-Response-Feedback discourse format and high frequency of display questions may have discouraged longer and more complex student response. Furthermore, according to the COLT analysis, a higher proportion of listening activities, which were mainly composed of passive listening to teacher talk as well as to peer talk, was identified in the Chinese EFL context. According to Zou (1998), this is a typical Chinese classroom where



...the teacher is the center of all teaching activities. Students are expected to sit quietly and just listen to what the teacher has got to say. Teaching is only a one-way flow action — from the teacher to the students, interaction has no place in the classroom. (p. 243)

In terms of the distribution of feedback and uptake across the three different settings, the results can be summarized as follows. In Chinese EFL classrooms, the distribution of prompts and recasts was in reverse order compared to French and Japanese immersion in Lyster and Mori (2006) as well as various other communicative contexts (Sheen, 2004), with prompts as the dominant type of feedback. Despite the fact that the three teachers in the Chinese EFL classrooms demonstrated different teaching styles and focus of instruction, they unanimously showed preference for prompts as the way of correcting learners' errors over recasts and explicit correction.

Second, learners in Chinese EFL showed a higher rate of response (i.e., uptake) after teachers' feedback than students in numerous other contexts previously reported (Lochtman, 2002; Lyster & Mori, 2006; Sheen, 2004). In addition, data revealed a very high repair rate in general. This finding is in concurrent with previous findings which collectively demonstrate that in more form-oriented contexts, students tend to respond to feedback more frequently and have higher repair rate than in contexts that are more oriented towards meaning or content (Lyster & Mori, 2006; Sheen, 2004).

Finally, in terms of the uptake and repair rate in response to each feedback type, explicit correction and prompts had an equally high uptake rate while prompts had a higher repair rate than explicit correction; recasts had the lowest uptake and repair rate. One might think that these results would suggest that recasts in Chinese EFL were not as effective at eliciting repair and uptake as the other types of feedback. However, qualitative examination of the transcripts revealed that in all of the cases in which recasts were followed by no uptake, there was topic continuation by the teacher, which deprived students of the opportunity to uptake or repair. In fact, all of the recasts in the Chinese EFL context were, as Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) noted "quite explicitly corrective" (p. 341). Therefore, it is speculated that

recasts in such contexts may also be noticeable by the learners because of their explicitness.

A prominent feature of recasts in the Chinese EFL context was that they were always given with a rising intonation with emphasis on specific words. It has been argued that prosodic cues alone or together with the short student and teacher turns (which was observed in the present study, especially in the junior middle school classroom) can make recasts more salient (Oliver & Mackey, 2003). These types of recasts could be classified as what Sheen (2004) called “reduced” or “partial” recasts, which certainly situates on the explicit end of the continuum. In the Chinese EFL setting, in 3 out of 10 cases there was opportunity for uptake after recasts or the teacher required students to uptake, which provided an optimal condition for students to notice recasts and incorporate them in their subsequent utterances, as illustrated in Example (4).

- (4) T: Hi, Ilva. Let me see. Do you know what's this in English?  
S: It's a right.  
T: It's a **light**. (slowly)  
S: Uh, it's a light.  
T: It's a light. Can you spell “light”?  
S: L-I-G-H-T.  
T: Very good. Sit down, please.

An interesting note was that after learner repair, teachers always seized the opportunity to reinforce the target feature by either repeating it or providing metalinguistic information, as in Example (6).

- Example 6:  
T: Number two, “set down all the records and send them in to the Beijing Olympic Committee.” Any mistakes? Tian Mi, tell me. Which part is wrong?  
S: all the records.  
T: should be...  
S: advices.

T: **advices?** (With rising intonation)

S: suggestions.

T: Yes, suggestions. Actually, advice is uncountable. Sit down, please.

If repair indeed constitutes a means by which learners enhance their awareness of the target feature as well as their metalinguistic knowledge of it (Swain, 1995), this type of reinforcement may then be considered as the consolidation of this awareness and metalinguistic knowledge as Ellis (1990) maintained:

...Such an approach to error treatment was compatible with the central tenet of operant conditioning, namely that correct responses received positive reinforcement and negative responses negative reinforcement. (p. 25)

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As with other classroom studies, there are certain limitations in the present study. First, the sample size is small. Six hours of classroom interaction may not reveal a comprehensive pattern of feedback and uptake in Chinese EFL contexts. Increasing the sample size may provide more robust findings. Second, the present study remains primarily quantitative in nature. The inclusion of questionnaires and interviews may provide further insights of teachers' and students' perceptions of feedback. In addition, the present study only used immediate uptake as the indicator of noticing, or instances of learning. Future studies that are experimental or quasi-experimental in nature may directly measure the effect of various types of feedback on the acquisition of certain grammatical features. Finally, other individual variables (such as learner proficiency, aptitude, language analytic ability) (DeKeyser, 1993; Lin & Hedgcock, 1996; Sheen, 2007) as well as instructional variables other than communicative orientation may also account for the differences in feedback and uptake across different settings, which may be interesting topics of inquiry for further studies.

In conclusion, it is necessary to reiterate the importance of contextual factors in synthesizing results of classroom and laboratory studies on feedback and the potential effects of various kinds of feedback on second language learning. In the meantime, these factors may open up important topics of inquiry in the field of SLA in the future.

## THE AUTHOR

*Yingli Yang* is assistant professor in the School of International Studies, University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. Her current research interests include feedback, classroom research in SLA, and business English. Her recent publication, co-authored with Prof. Roy Lyster, *Effects of form-focused practice and feedback on Chinese EFL learners' acquisition of regular and irregular past-tense forms*, is to appear in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*.

The author would like to thank Prof. Roy Lyster for his valuable feedback on the earlier draft of this paper and two anonymous reviewers of Asia TEFL for their comments and suggestions. This study is sponsored by a research grant from Language Research Center (No. 86jmdyy096) at University of International Business and Economics.

Email: [yyingli@hotmail.com](mailto:yyingli@hotmail.com)

## REFERENCES

- Chaudron, C. (1988). *Second language classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. (1998). Beyond focus on form: Cognitive perspectives on learning and practicing second language grammar. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 42-63). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. (1993). The effect of error-correction on L2 grammar knowledge and

- oral proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal*, 77(4), 501-514.
- Ellis, R. (1990). *Instructed second language acquisition*. Cornwall: Blackwell Publishers.
- Ellis, R., & Sheen, Y. (2006). Re-examining the role of recasts in L2 acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 575-600.
- Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 339-368.
- Ellis, R., Basturkmen, H., & Loewen, S. (2001). Learner uptake in communicative ESL lessons. *Language Learning*, 51, 281-318.
- Havranek, G., & Cesnik, H. (2001). Factors affecting the success of corrective feedback. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 1, 99-122.
- Lin, Y.-H., & Hedgecock, J. (1996). Negative feedback incorporation among high-proficiency and low-proficiency Chinese-speaking learners of Spanish. *Language Learning*, 46, 567-611.
- Loewen, S. (2005). Incidental focus on form and second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, 361-286.
- Loewen, S. (2002). *The occurrence and effectiveness of incidental focus on form in meaning-focused ESL lessons*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Lochtman, K. (2002). Oral corrective feedback in the foreign language classroom: How it affects interaction in analytic foreign language teaching. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37, 271-283.
- Lyster, R., & Mori, H. (2006). Interactional feedback and instructional counterbalance. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28, 269-300.
- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19, 37-66.
- Mackey, A., & Philp, J. (1998). Conversational interaction and second language development: Recasts, responses, and red herrings? *The Modern Language Journal*, 82, 338-356.
- McDonough, K. (2005). Identifying the impact of negative feedback and learners' responses on ESL question development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, 79-103.
- Ohta, A. (2000). Rethinking recasts: A learner-centered examination of corrective feedback in the Japanese classroom. In J. K. Hall & L. Verplaester (Eds.), *The construction of second and foreign language learning through classroom interaction* (pp. 47-71). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Oliver, R., & Mackey, A. (2003). Interactional context and feedback in child ESL classrooms. *The Modern Language Journal*, 87, 519-533.
- Panova, I., & Lyster, R. (2002). Patterns of corrective feedback and uptake in an adult ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 573-595.
- Russell, J., & Spada, N. (2006). The effectiveness of corrective feedback for second language acquisition: A meta-analysis of the research. In J. Norris & L. Ortega (Eds.) *Synthesizing research on language learning and teaching* (pp. 133-163). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Seedhouse, P. (2004). *The interactional architecture of the language classroom: A conversation analysis perspective*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Seedhouse, P. (1997). The case of the missing "no": The relationship between pedagogy and interaction. *Language Learning*, 47, 547-583.
- Sheen, Y. (2004). Corrective feedback and learner uptake in communicative classrooms across instructional settings. *Language Teaching Research*, 8, 263-300.
- Sheen, Y. (2007). The effects of corrective feedback, language aptitude and learner attitudes on the acquisition of English articles. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition: A series of empirical studies* (pp. 301-323). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spada, N. (1997). Form-focused instruction and second language acquisition: A review of classroom and laboratory research. *Language Teaching*, 29, 1-15.
- Spada, N., & Lightbown, P. (1993). Instruction and the development of questions in the L2 classroom. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15, 205-221.
- Spada, N., & Fröhlich, M. (1995). *COLT. Communicative orientation of language teaching observation scheme: Coding conventions and applications*. Sydney, Australia: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research.
- Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.), *Principles and practice in the study of language* (pp. 125-144). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tomasello, M., & Herron, C. (1988). Down the garden path: Inducing and correcting overgeneralization errors in the foreign language classroom. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 9, 237-246.
- Tomasello, M., & Herron, C. (1989). Feedback for language transfer errors. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 11, 385-395.
- Tsang, W. (2004). Feedback and uptake in teacher-student interaction: An analysis of 18 English lessons in Hong Kong secondary classrooms. *Regional Language Centre Journal*, 35, 187-209.
- Zou, Y. (1998). English training for professionals in China: Introducing a successful EFL training programme. *System*, 26, 235-248.