



## **A Synthesis of Oral Corrective Feedback Literature: Theoretical Underpinning, Types, Linguistics Focus and Timing**

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### **Introduction**

Oral corrective feedback (henceforth, CF) has received significant attention in research of second language (L2) acquisition (SLA) as well as language teaching in the last two decades. In L2 teaching, CF is “the feedback that learners receive on the linguistic errors they make in their oral and written production in a second language” (Sheen & Ellis, 2011, p. 593). CF addresses the gap between the learners’ problematic interlanguage and the target language form in the case of any inaccurate utterance. It has been defined simply as the teacher’s “responses to learner utterances containing an error” (Ellis 2006, p. 28).

A great deal of research on the effect of CF in L2 education has found that it is beneficial for the language development of L2 learners (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). Nevertheless, existing literature shows that CF by teachers and its effects depend on aspects such as the type, linguistic focus and timing of the CF. Empirical studies and a growing number of meta-analyses have mostly reported the degree of the significance of one type of CF or other as well as which particular linguistics item should be corrected and when to provide CF in an instructional environment. Through synthesizing the descriptive observational research on CF by L2 teachers, this study aims to (i) conceptualize CF and its significance from major theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence; (ii) examine the major types of CF and their distribution; (iii) highlight key linguistics focus in providing CF; and (iv) find the most frequently used timing in providing CF.

### **Conceptualizing Corrective Feedback**

The goal of L2 teaching methods and approaches, grammar–translational method being the exception, is to develop communicative competence in the learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In line with this notion, communicative language teaching (CLT) emerged as a language teaching method during the early 1980s (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). From then on, CLT has been the most used language teaching method in L2 classrooms (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Strong form CLT focuses only on the meaning and ignores

linguistic accuracy as long as the meaning is comprehensible (Howatt, 1984). On the other hand, in the weak form of CLT, there is a scope to focus on form (FonF), which draws the learners' attention to the linguistics element of L2 (Long, 1996). Two major categories of FonF are *proactive* and *reactive* (Long, 1996). Proactive, defined as FonF in which "attention is given to linguistic items identified as problematic, although no immediate error has been produced" (Loewen, 2011, p. 579). In contrast, reactive type of FonF, or CF (see Ellis, 2016), is defined as FonF in which "attention to form can occur sporadically in response to any errors produced by the student" (Loewen, 2011, p. 579). As discussed above, CF is a reactive type of FonF that occurs in both the negotiation of meaning and of form (Ellis, 2016).

Provided the growing significance of CF research, from the theoretical perspective, effectiveness of CF on the learners' interlanguage development has been a topic of much discussion in SLA research (Lyster & Saito, 2010). SLA researchers are not unanimous about the significance of providing CF, especially, while some communication takes place. The foundation of CF is in the works of psycho-cognitive theorists, most specifically in Schmidt's noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) and Long's (1996) interactionist theory, both of which emphasize the importance of positive as well as negative evidence in L2 development and justify the importance of the learner's understanding of the gap between his/her non-target-like L2 production and the target form, and make subsequent modifications (Long, 2015). Noticing is important in recognizing form/meaning distinction, adopting the given input by noticing the formal features in the input (e.g., L2 instruction, CF), and then noticing the gap by identifying the differences between the given input and the learner's own output (Schmidt, 1990). In the context of L2 instruction, a variety of feedback types during a given task of learning is provided to continue noticing. Long (1996) reinforced the importance of noticing in the interactional hypothesis; however, he also emphasized the significance of meaningful output through negotiation for meaning. Furthermore, he conceptualised the interaction as facilitative of "acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention and output in productive ways" (Long, 1996, p. 452). Principally, different CF techniques, such as prompts, are used to negotiate meaning through communication, to facilitate the adjustment of comprehensible input and to generate meaningful output (Long, 1996). In summary, these psycho-cognitive theorists believe that it is important to provide CF to enrich the learners' understanding of the provided input and in generating meaningful output.

### **Empirical Studies on the CF Effectiveness**

Studies investigating the effectiveness of CF have found largely incongruent results depending on whether the research was conducted in a laboratory or a classroom (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). The contextual and pragmatic variations between laboratory-based and classroom setting studies have contributed to different learning outcomes (Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). For example, according to Li (2010), "the fact that in the classroom context, there is more distraction, and feedback is often not directed toward individual learners" (p. 345). This is not the case in laboratory-based studies (Li, 2018). Therefore, this review focuses on the role of CF in classroom settings. In the instructional context of a classroom, substantial empirical evidence was provided in Lyster and Ranta's (1997) study in which they show that CF is addressed in cognitive theories of SLA (e.g., Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1990) and it does have significant pedagogical implications as well as contributing to L2 development. In another study, Lyster and Mori (2006, p. 278) argued, "teacher-student interaction has a clearly pedagogical focus that relates not only to meaning but also to formal accuracy, quality of expression, and literacy development". The underlying assumption is that CF promotes L2 acquisition in learners by providing a target input (Lyster, 1998). The study of Plonsky and Brown (2015) reviewed 18 meta-analyses and have synthesized various domains of CF research such as oral, written, computer-mediated with general outcomes that significantly support the effectiveness of CF in L2 learning. It can be argued about the type of CF to be provided, focusing on which linguistic item and at what time. Nevertheless, Lyster et al. (2013) conclude that providing CF is more beneficial for the learners than providing no CF at all. Therefore, CF in L2

education is viewed as an instructional input that is delivered with the expectation that learners will process it and then correct their L2 errors (Yu, Wang, & Teo, 2018).

### Corrective Feedback Types

It is difficult to create a unified framework for CF types, partly because a variety of feedback types have been explored in several primary studies and different ways of providing the same type of feedback in different studies (Li, 2010). Table 1 (Adapted from Brown, 2016; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Yu, Wang, & Teo, 2018) summarizes a variety of categorizations by numerous CF theorists from dozens of categories to several CF dichotomous views. Among the early studies that identified various types of CF and provided the primary groundwork for L2 classroom research, Chaudron (1977) introduced a taxonomy that contains 28 types of CF.

TABLE 1  
CF Types

Respective study and the number of CF types studied	CF types				
Chaudron (1977): 28 types of CF types reported.	Altered Question, Original Question, Interrupt, Return, Negation, Intonational marking, Interruption, Expansion, Emphasis, Clue, Delay, Provide, Explanation, Complex Explanation, Loop, Transfer, etc.				
Lyster and Ranta (1997): 6 types of CF types reported.	Recast, Repetition, Explicit correction, Clarification request, Elicitation, Metalinguistic cue				
Ranta and Lyster (2007); and Lyster and Saito (2010): 6 types of CF reported, however, further distinguished them under two categories based on the nature of CF	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Prompt</th> <th>Reformulation</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Clarification request, Elicitation, Repetition, Metalinguistic cue</td> <td>Recast, Explicit correction,</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Prompt	Reformulation	Clarification request, Elicitation, Repetition, Metalinguistic cue	Recast, Explicit correction,
Prompt	Reformulation				
Clarification request, Elicitation, Repetition, Metalinguistic cue	Recast, Explicit correction,				

However, a majority of primary studies and meta-analyses have been based on the scheme that was developed by Lyster and associates (1998, 2006, 2010, 2013), grounded on the primary work of Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) taxonomy of CF types. Lyster and Ranta (1997) consolidated their overarching taxonomy into six error types, grounded on their descriptive study of teacher–student interaction in French immersion classrooms. Further distinctions based on the nature of implicitness and explicitness of CF have been made by Sheen and Ellis (2011). Based on the three predominant works on the types of CF, Lyster and Ranta (1997), Lyster and Saito (2010) and Sheen and Ellis (2011), a continuum of the taxonomies of CF has been produced for the conceptual analysis of CF types in the current study, as shown in Figure 1.

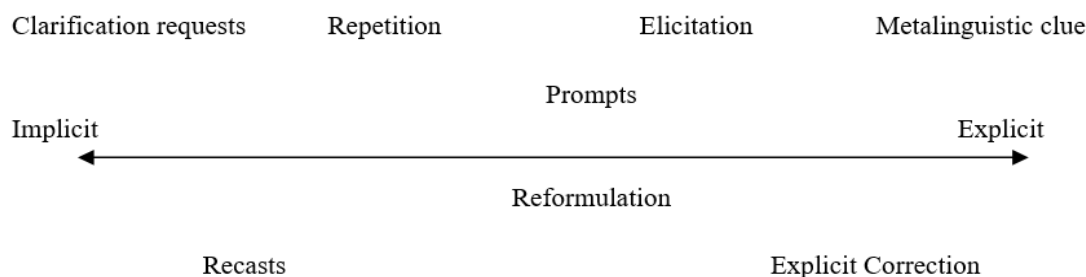


Figure 1. Continuum of CF types (Adapted from Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Sheen & Ellis, 2011)

Lately, Sheen and Ellis (2011) have conceptualised reformulations and prompts into additional distinctions based on the explicit and implicit nature of CF types. They explained that clarification requests and repetition are examples of implicit prompts, whereas, elicitation and metalinguistic clues are explicit prompts. The extent to which a CF is considered either implicit or explicit is predominantly relevant with Long’s (1996) interaction hypothesis. It highlights the primary role of noticing input (Schmidt, 1990) during interaction. This means that the type of CF learners will notice more is explicit; contrary to this, the types of CF that receive less notice tend to be implicit in nature. From the teacher’s point of view, the taxonomy of Sheen and Ellis (2011) further distinguishes between explicit CF, providing correct forms (e.g., explicit correction) with correct forms. Based on the distinction between reformulations and prompts (Lyster & Saito, 2010), ranging from implicit to explicit (Sheen & Ellis, 2011), the above-mentioned continuum illustrates various CF types. These types are also exemplified in Table 2 (Adapted from Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Yu, Wang, & Teo, 2018)

TABLE 2  
Conceptualizing Types of CF

CF Types	Description of the CF types	Example
<b>Clarification Request</b>	In this type of CF, the teacher conveys a message to the learner that his/her utterance is ill-formed and needs further reformulation. In this CF type, the teacher may use phrases like “Pardon?” or “Excuse me?” and “I don’t understand.”	S: Yesterday, my sister gives me a doll. T: I don’t understand.
<b>Elicitation</b>	In elicitation, the teacher directly elicits a reformulation from the student by asking questions or by asking learners to reformulate their utterances like “Can you repeat?”	S: Yesterday, my sister gives me a doll. T: Yesterday your sister.....
<b>Metalinguistic cue</b>	The teacher asks questions or provide remarks regarding the well-formedness of student’s utterance. The teacher indicates the presence of an error by providing verbal and linguistic clues, inviting the learner to self-correct (e.g., “Do we say it like that?”	S: Yesterday, my sister gives me a doll. T: Do we say <i>give</i> when it is in the past?
<b>Repetition</b>	The teacher repeats the ill-formed utterance of the student, modifying the intonation to illustrate the error.	S: Yesterday, my sister gives me a doll. T: Yesterday, sister gives ...? (rising intonation on the erroneous past.)
<b>Recast</b>	The teacher implicitly reformulates all or part of the student’s utterance	S: Yesterday, my sister gives me a doll. T: Oh, she gave you a doll.
<b>Explicit correction</b>	The teacher clearly indicates that what the student had said was incorrect, by providing the correct form	S: Yesterday, my sister gives me a doll. T: No, you should say <i>gave</i> . Yesterday my sister <i>gave</i> me a doll.

Different strategies can be used to provide CF. They range from input-providing (recasts and explicit correction) to output-pushing (prompts), but both categories can differ in how explicit or implicit they are (Sheen & Ellis, 2011). According to the existing literature on CF, teachers have used all types of CF in classroom in different contexts (Brown, 2016; Lyster et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2018).

### Distribution of CF Types

The effectiveness of these techniques is still a topic of debate (for a review, see Nassaji, 2016). It is because findings of the classroom-based research are apparently dissimilar and more conclusive evidence is required, and the overall utility of CF relies on learners’ ability to notice feedback and recognize its corrective intent (Nassaji, 2016). To highlight the existing gap in the literature in providing a specific type of CF, Mackey and Goo (2007, p. 440) emphasized “the need for greater theoretical specificity or practical motivations in making claims about the superiority of one feedback type over another”. On that note, existing literature has investigated how teachers and students distinguish the different types of CF, and how spoken errors are addressed through several techniques of CF.

Both kinds of reformulations have occurred in L2 instructional contexts. Implicit reformulation or recasts have been found as the most preferred type of CF provided by teachers (Brown, 2016). A recent meta-analysis by Yu et al. (2018) found recast as the single most used type of CF, followed by different types of prompts being the second most preferred CF in the list. Although teachers' prompts are useful in developing L2, in Yoshida's (2008) study, conducted in Japan, teachers preferred recasts because they helped maintaining a "supportive classroom environment" (p. 89). Moreover, the implicit nature of recasts lets teachers avoid focusing on accuracy without embarrassing the learners (Kamiya & Lowen, 2014), especially when their proficiency makes self-correction challenging (Yoshida, 2010). Lyster and Ranta (1997), authors of one of the fundamental studies that has shaped CF, in a French immersion setting observed four teachers and 104 students in grades four and five for 18 and a half hours and found that teachers provide recasts more than half (55%) of the time.

The explicit type of reformulation, as the name suggests, as a type of explicit correction has been found to be popular among the learners; however, teachers hold mixed opinions (Roothoof & Breeze, 2016). In an early study, Herron and Tomasello (1988) studied 32 learners, whose average age was 19.5, of French as an L2. The study reported explicit correction as the preferred type of CF in the classroom. Similarly, DeKeyser (1993) studied 35 Dutch students learning French as L2 and observed explicit correction to be most used CF. Rahimi and Zhang (2015) examined 40 L2 teachers to find out what they thought about the necessity, timing and types of CF. The results indicated that the group of experienced L2 teachers rated explicit feedback as the most effective way of facilitating L2 acquisition. However, less experienced teachers utilised recast and other implicit prompts to provide feedback (Rahimi & Zhang, 2015).

Prompts (clarification requests, repetition, elicitation, metalinguistic clues), despite their limited utilisation by teachers while providing feedback, lead to the highest amount of uptake (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). A probable explanation of the phenomenon can be found in Brown's (2009) study. He compared first- and second-year English learners' uptake of the provided feedback. He found that the senior students, whose proficiency was better, tended to find prompts and implicit CF as more useful feedback provided by the teacher. Similarly, Ammar and Spada (2006) compared the effects of recasts and prompts. Prompts were found to be either equally beneficial for high-proficiency learners or significantly superior to recasts for low-proficiency learners. Although aforementioned studies have reported possible benefits of prompts, in empirical studies and meta-analyses of teachers' preference for prompts as a CF type is less reported whereas reformulations have been found to be more dominant (Brown, 2016; Kamiya & Loewen, 2014).

However, Ellis (2016) emphasized the utility of both, providing prompts and reformulations as CF, provided that they both contribute in different ways in the learners' L2 development. Moreover, the phenomenon should be investigated in different settings to help reach firmer conclusions regarding L2 teachers' preferences for different CF types as the context of these results are varied (Lyster et al., 2013).

### **Linguistic Focus in CF**

Another aspect that has been discussed widely in L2 development in relation to CF distribution is the linguistic focus/error type. A meta-analysis by Lyster et al. (2013) identified four major linguistic focuses: grammatical, lexical, phonological and pragmatic. Recent meta-analyses (e.g., Brown, 2016; Yu, Wang, & Teo, 2018), have also found that these four are the most significant types of focus a teacher has when they provide different types of CF.

CF research has largely focused on grammatical targets, and errors such as questions formation, passive forms, past tense, articles, and possessive determiners are found to receive most CF (Ellis, 2007). Mackey and Goo's (2007) meta-analysis demonstrated that CF effects are significantly larger for lexical than for grammatical development. Moreover, Lyster (1998) found that learners' lexical errors receive maximum feedback in terms of the overall proportion of errors made. These errors range from ungrammatical lexical uses to mispronunciations. The other type of linguistic focus provided by teachers, the phonological CF, focuses on the intelligibility of the learners' production and practice in the correct form in response to the

pronunciation of their teachers' model (Saito & Lyster, 2012). Lastly, pragmatics focus on errors produced by learners in speech acts such as refusals, invitations, requests, offers, suggestions, agreements, complaints and apologies (Jeon & Kaya, 2006, cited in Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013). Although existing literature contains varied findings regarding the linguistic item most corrected by teachers (Mackey, Gass, & MacDonough, 2000), teachers provide a greater emphasis on grammatical errors of their students in the classroom (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004). However, Mori (2011) believes that communication is the key focus in L2 instruction and thus grammatical errors should be corrected cautiously.

### Timing in Providing CF

Timing in providing CF is an issue that SLA researchers have often put great emphasis on. In general, teachers can give immediate CF to a student's errors or delay correction until later. There are comparative studies that have studied immediate and delayed corrective feedback. Tomczyk (2013) surveyed 43 secondary school teachers and found that delayed feedback was favoured by the teachers (98.02%), followed by immediate feedback (18.6%) and postponed feedback (13.95%). The rationale behind such patterns is that providing feedback during the performance of a communicative task will have a negative effect on fluency (Yu et al., 2018). However, Li, Zhu and Ellis (2016) interpreted their finding as positive evidence for immediate CF practices. In the same vein, from the theoretical perspective, Lightbown and Spada (2006) found, considering the noticeability of CF by the learners, to be the immediate corrective feedback most effective. According to them, teachers' immediate CF would allow learners to have more opportunity to receive and use the feedback. A distinction has been drawn between experienced and non-experienced teachers by Rahimi and Zhang (2015). Their study revealed that experienced teachers provide immediate CF and novice teachers provide delayed feedback. The reason they give for this divergence is the aforementioned issue of hindrance in developing fluency.

### Summary of Reviewed Literature

We have reviewed a wide range of studies and theoretical propositions to discuss CF in L2 instruction. Table 3 contains a concrete summary.

TABLE 3  
*Summary of the Findings and Discussion*

Issue	Summary
<b>Theoretical, empirical and pedagogical significance of CF</b>	Schmidt's noticing hypothesis and Long's interactional hypothesis support the significance of CF in L2 development. The empirical and pedagogical evidence back the theoretical underpinning of CF. Studies have found CF to be better than no CF in L2 achievements. Learners want to be corrected in their production and teachers have found providing feedback useful.
<b>CF types and their distribution</b>	Six types of CF types – recast, repetition, explicit correction, clarification request, elicitation, metalinguistic cue – have been identified. These types are further categorised into reformulations and prompts, and implicit and explicit correction. Reformulations are the most used CF category. Recasts have been found to be utilised most by teachers. Prompts are found to be less likely used by the teachers and students. However, prompts have the highest uptake among the CF types. The effectiveness of CF is significantly dependent on the proficiency of learners.
<b>Linguistics focus of CF</b>	Although the usefulness of CF focusing on lexical errors is more effective, in the existing studies teachers are found to focus on learners' grammatical errors in most cases; pronunciation is the second most corrected error type.
<b>Timing of CF</b>	Although earlier studies have supported delayed CF more, recent studies have countered with evidence and supported immediate correction. However, it largely depends on teachers and learners and the type of CF being used.

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