



Volume: 05/ N°: 02 June (2021),

p 425-433

***A Holistic Theory View about Second Language
Corrective Feedback***

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Abstract ;

Enter Despite the fact that the impact of corrective feedback on second language acquisition has sparked considerable debate among researchers and theorists, it is commonly used as a pedagogical method in L2 classrooms and is supported by various SLA theories, each with its own claims, arguments, principles, and stances. In this paper, the definition and typology of corrective feedback are presented, followed by a description of three theoretical underpinnings of CF, which reflect three dimensions: cognitive, social, and psychological. The socio-cognitive theory is then described as a comprehensive theory that incorporates all three dimensions. Last but not least, a series of corrective feedback pedagogic implications are provided from a socio-cognitive perspective.

Article info

*Received
24./04/2021*

*Accepted
24/05/2021*

- ✓ Second language;*
- ✓ Social dimension;*
- ✓ cognitive dimension;*
- ✓ socio-cognitive dimension;*
- ✓ Corrective*

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1. 1. Introduction

Since decades interest in corrective feedback in language pedagogy and second language acquisition has always been and still is acute and a controversial issue as there is very little agreement whether or not to correct errors, what to correct and when and how to undertake it. Moreover, will this correction be effective or not.

The rationale for expecting that corrective feedback can be beneficial to language learners rests on various theoretical underpinnings. Without claiming to provide an in-depth and comprehensive overview of related theoretical notions and insights, this paper will sum up some of the theoretical foundations of corrective feedback in second language (L2) classrooms.

2. Definition and typology:

2.1. Definition

Corrective feedback is defined by Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006) as the responses to learner utterances incorporating error. These responses consist of three main elements: (1) an indication that an error has been committed, (2) correction of the target language form, or metalinguistic information about the nature of the error. As it may happen according to them that a response combines all of them. Ohta (2001, p. 135) offers a wider definition of corrective feedback by stating that: “An utterance was considered to have a corrective function if it had the potential of drawing a learner’s attention to his or her erroneous utterance”. A detailed definition is set forth in the following element within which a typology of corrective feedback is highlighted.

2.2. Corrective feedback typology

Generally, L2 learners face, as Long (1996) argues, two types of input: *positive evidence* and *negative evidence*. The former offers to learners the acceptable patterns in the target language in different ways,

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either by presenting an authentic native speaker (NS) discourse or in a modified or simplified language or by elaborating the input to make the learner comprehension easier. However, the latter, as Long & Robinson (1998) declare, provides learners with information about what is unacceptable in the target language. This information is transmitted to learners either before the incorrect use of the or afterwards.

In this vein, Lyster and Ranta (1997) identify six types of corrective feedback: recasts, repetition, clarification, elicitation, explicit correction, and meta-linguistic clue. To illustrate, the error in tense use in the utterance “She go to the cinema last Friday” can be responded to by providing a recast, that is, reformulating the sentence without changing the meaning: “She went”; by simply repeating the wrong part or the whole sentence to alert the learner to the presence of an error: “She go?”; by making a clarification request with the intention of making the learner aware of the problematic nature of the production: “Sorry?”; by eliciting the correct form from the learner: “She ...?”; by informing the learner of the problem and providing the correct form: “Not ‘go’—went”; or by making a meta-linguistic comment: “You must use the past tense.”

This typology served Li (2010) to go further by proposing another categorization in two different views. The first view, according to Li, has to do with dividing the six types into explicit and implicit, depending on whether the learner’s attention is overtly drawn to an error. Thus, recasts, repetition, clarification, and elicitation are implicit in comparison with explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback. In the second view Li (2010) relates his classification to the extent of self-repair encouragement, where recasts and explicit correction are referred to as input-providing feedback because they provide the correct form rather than motivating the learner to self-correct. The other four feedback types are collectively called output-prompting feedback because they invite self-correction without the provision of correct form.

3. Corrective feedback dimensions:

Research on corrective feedback dealt with its effect on second language acquisition within different frameworks and, accordingly,

varying dimensions of CF had been explored such that: the cognitive dimension, the social dimension, and the psychological dimension.

As far as the cognitive dimension is concerned, the core interest of researchers was seeking to comprehend how the information provided by CF is processed and this by examining the interplay between input, output, and the learner's internal mechanisms (Ellis, 2010). In this regard, the Interaction Hypothesis, the Output theory, and the Noticing Hypothesis theory are the ones that account for this interplay and assume a set of processes common to all learners regardless the individual differences and the context within which the corrective feedback occurs (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006). Additionally, they intersect in what Long (1991) termed 'focus on form', where CF occupies an important place.

Researchers focusing on the social dimension think that learners' practice of CF and their ability to benefit from it can be influenced, to a far extent, by the social context and the participants' social background. In contrast, researchers interested in the psychological dimension examine how differences in factors as beliefs about learning, attitudes, language aptitude, learning style, personality, motivation, and anxiety influence the teacher's choice of CF strategies and learners' responses to them. However, it is worth noting that the approach that seems best at integrating the three dimensions is the socio-cognitive one which incorporates a full account of CF (Ellis, 2010).

4. The Socio-cognitive Theory

Atkinson (2002) introduced the concept of Sociocognition which combines between the physical and the social worlds to which individuals are attuned, and also the patterns they generate and use internally. Batstone (2010, p. 5) declares that "Sociocognition is based on the view that neither language use nor language learning can be adequately defined or understood without recognizing that they have both a social and a cognitive dimension which interact.

In the same vein Atkinson (2002, p. 537) appeals to a greater integration of the social and cognitive aspects in L2 learning, with a focus on the learner's active participation in situated linguistic activities:

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a sociocognitive approach to SLA would take the social dimension of language and its acquisition seriously Second, language and its acquisition would be fully integrated into other activities, people, and things in a sociocognitive approach to SLA. They would be seen as integral parts of larger sociocognitive wholes, or, in Gee's (1992) term, Discourses Third, language and its acquisition, from a socio-cognitive perspective, would be seen in terms of 'action' and 'participation'—as providing an extremely powerful semiotic means of performing and participating in activity-in-the-world (Rogoff, 1990, 1998; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Finally, a socio-cognitive perspective should not, strictly speaking, exclude. As an approach to language, it is fundamentally cognitive and fundamentally social . . . it argues for the profound interdependency and integration of both.

When it comes to learning, it is seen from a socio-cognitive perspective as an internal mental process that may or may not be reflected in immediate behavioral change (Bandura, 1986), where Learners are regarded as dialectically tied to the social contexts in a synergetic relation (Meskill & Rangelova, 2000).

4.1. The socio-cognitive theory principles:

Three principles are proposed by Atkinson (2010b) on which socio-cognitive approach to second language acquisition is based: (1) *The Inseparability principle*, (2) *the Learning-Is-Adaptive principle*, and (3) *the Alignment principle*. In the Inseparability principle, Atkinson (2010b, p. 27) says that “Mind, body, and ecosocial world are inseparable contributors to SLA processes, so to understand such processes these elements must be considered together.” This view is more sustained by the stance of Batstone (2010; cited in Atkinson (2010b, p. 27) who argue that within the inseparability principle: “. . . the social and the cognitive are indivisible and can only be properly understood by keeping their essential unity intact. The second principle is *the Learning-is-adaptive*. In this principle, Atkinson (2010b, p. 27) claims that “learning is largely a process of better adapting to our

ecosocial environment.” Arguing that since cognition is ecosocial incorporating the adaptive action and because the embodied cognition enables humans to adapt to their environments, and since learning is a cognitive process, hence learning is adaptive (Atkinson, 2010b). The third principle has to do with *the Alignment* principle which focuses on the construction of the social meaning. In this regard, Atkinson defines alignment as “. . . the means by which social actors participate in the ongoing construction of social meaning and action in public/socio-cognitive space. In mutually attending, negotiating, sharing information and emotions, solving interactional/ communicative problems, building participation frameworks, interacting with their extended cognitive surroundings, etc., social actors dynamically adapt to their environments, creating shared meaning in mind-body-world” (Atkinson, 2010b, p. 29).

After having introduced the socio-cognitive theory and its principles on which it is based, the upcoming section explains the socio-cognitive dimension of the corrective feedback.

4.2. The socio-cognitive dimension of the corrective feedback:

The essence of this approach, according to Atkinson’s view (2002), is that language acquisition occurs *in* rather than *as a result* of interaction and consequently second language acquisition can not be seen as purely individual-based process but as one shared activity. From this perspective, Atkinson as cited by Ellis, (2010) adds: “linguistic knowledge can only be accounted for if the cognizing individuals’ linguistic knowledge is seen as abetted by, actuated within, and broadly continuous with a rich social context” .i. e., besides the shared purpose of any social activity, there should exist also the compatibility among the participants in terms of their individual beliefs and predispositions.

When it comes to the theory view of CF, Atkinson et al. (2007) pinpoint to ‘alignment’ which is set forth as the complex means by which interaction can be maintained in dynamically adaptive way. They believe that “corrective feedback needs to be understood in terms of what goes on between participants in their socio-cognitive worlds rather than in terms of what happens inside their heads (Ellis. p. 160). From this perspective, Atkinson et al. (2007) extend this view by

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considering the corrective feedback a process of ‘co-cognizing which is evident in the participants’ mutual verbal behavior, and in the boundaries existing between the learner and his interlocutor, between person and object (the language exercise), social action and cognition, and between learning and use. Thus, it can be assumed that dialogic interaction is substantial in the socio-cognitive theory as it offers the teacher the convenient context within which he can fine-tune the learning of the learners who are supposed to be active participants in their learning (Anton, 1999)

Literature shows that the socio-cognitive theory intersects with the sociocultural theory being the theory best equipped to explain corrective feedback in a multidimensional way. It can be noticed that the socio-cognitive theory basics in dealing with CF are inspired from the sociocultural theory. For instance, learning can be achieved by what researchers termed the successful tailoring of interaction to the developmental level of learners. i.e., what can be effective for one learner cannot be so for another. Also, the affordances are socially constructed within a framework that ensures the internalization of interpersonal behavior as self-regulated cognition which recognizes the individual autonomy (Ellis, 2010).

An other key construct is the one of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) identified by Vygotsky (1978) which is the second one of the three developmental levels that represents the potential development as evidenced in problem-solving undertaken with the assistance of an expert or through collaboration with partners. The ZPD is viewed as a space for studying how interaction mediates learning through the construction of ZPD’s (Anton, 1999). The following section sheds light on some implications of the CF from the socio-cognitive view.

5. Corrective feedback pedagogic implications from the socio-cognitive view:

A set of implications of the socio-cognitive theory for the corrective feedback are proposed by researchers in this realm are set forth. Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1994) insist on the collaborative endeavor that the

corrective feedback must entail where the learners must agree on a common goal behind the CF. Also, the CF must reflect the actual need on the part of the learner, and must be flexible and adapted to each learner and to the context where it takes place. Additionally, the effectiveness of CF can be ensured if the assistance is fine-tuned to the learner needs, and takes account of the affective needs of the learner. A CF is said to be successful if it offers the learner the possibility to construct a ZPD. Finally, it is not plausible to consider one type of CF more effective than another as what is best for a learner in one context cannot be so in another context (Ellis, 2010)

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