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## Corrective feedback in teacher guides and SLA

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### ABSTRACT

The kind of technical knowledge found in teacher guides is fundamentally different from the kind of technical knowledge found in published research about language learning. I refer to the former as 'pedagogic discourse' and to the latter as 'research-based discourse'. The purpose of this article is to examine how links can be made between these two types of technical discourse. I will discuss two different ways. The first involves familiarizing teachers with what researchers have found out about L2 learning and then applying the findings to language pedagogy (i.e. SLA research → Language pedagogy). The second way is to start with commonly held views about how to teach (as reflected in the teacher guides) and then consider these in the light of how learners learn (i.e. Language pedagogy → SLA research). I will present arguments in favour of the second approach and illustrate it through an examination of commonly held pedagogic views about corrective feedback and the extent to which these are supported or questioned by what is known about corrective feedback in SLA.

**Keywords:** corrective feedback; teacher guides; SLA research; language pedagogy

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## Introduction

Language teaching is an inherently practical affair while second language acquisition research (SLA) constitutes a research discipline. As Hirst (1966) pointed out:

To try to understand the nature and pattern of some practical discourse in terms of the nature and patterns of some purely theoretical discourse can only result in its being radically misconceived.

In terms of language teaching, ‘practical discourse’ refers to the moment-by-moment decisions that teachers make in the process of conducting a lesson and that manifest themselves in teaching-as-interaction. In making these decisions, teachers typically draw on their ‘practical knowledge’ of what works in a specific instructional context – knowledge shaped more by experience than study. ‘Theoretical discourse’ embodies the ‘technical knowledge’ that is available in expository accounts of teaching and learning. It consists of statements about what and how to teach and the theoretical rationale for these. Language teachers may also draw on this technical knowledge both in planning a lesson and in implementing it in the classroom although teachers’ primary concern with practical action does not readily allow for the application of technical knowledge. ‘Technical knowledge’, however, is important. It provides a body of information that teachers can draw on to reflect on their teaching and to experiment with new possibilities.

This article examines the ‘technical knowledge’ about teaching and learning made available through ‘theoretical discourse’. This type of knowledge itself, however, is not monolithic. The kind of technical knowledge found in teacher guides is fundamentally different from the kind of technical knowledge found in published research about language teaching and learning. I refer to the former as ‘pedagogic discourse’ and the latter as ‘research-based discourse’ [1]. The differences are evident in their epistemological bases. Pedagogic discourse draws on authors’ prior knowledge of such discourse and on their own practical experience of teaching a language. As Underhill (in Scrivener, 2005) wrote in his general introduction to the MacMillan Books for Teachers ‘we take a “Learning as you go approach” in sharing our experience with you’ (p. 9). Pedagogic discourse is intended for teachers and thus is written in a form that is accessible to this audience. Its aim is to be ‘practical’ – to offer suggestions for what might work in the classroom. Research-based discourse, in contrast, draws on well-established formats for conducting and reporting confirmatory and descriptive research in order to demonstrate validity or trustworthiness. It is intended for fellow researchers and although it may propose a number of ‘practical’ applications, it is primarily directed at theory-testing or theory-building. Frequently, it is couched in language that is not accessible to outsiders. However, in Hirst’s terms both pedagogic discourse and research-based discourse constitute ‘theoretical discourse’.

I am interested in exploring the relationship between the pedagogic discourse found in teacher guides (e.g. Harmer, 1983; Hedge, 2000; Ur, 1996; Scrivener, 2005) and in the research-based discourse found in published SLA research. There are two ways of going about this. One way is to familiarize teachers with the research-based discourse of SLA and propose how this can inform the pedagogic discourse of teacher guides:

(1) SLA discourse → Pedagogic discourse

There are now a number of comprehensive surveys of SLA theory and research (e.g., Gass & Selinker, 2002; Ellis, 2008; Ortega, 2009). These books, however, treat ‘SLA’ as an academic discipline and it is questionable whether such books have much direct relevance to language pedagogy. Other surveys (e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 2006), however, have been written with teachers in mind and, therefore, are client-centred. Nevertheless, even these do not directly address

the 'questions that teachers ask' (Pica, 1994). The starting point for the proposals found in teacher guides is not 'How do learners learn?' but rather 'How should teachers teach?'

The second way is to start with commonly held views about what constitutes sound language pedagogy and then consider these in the light of what is known about how learners learn:

(2) Pedagogic discourse → SLA discourse

Such an approach, it can be argued, accords more with how teachers and teacher educators view the contribution that SLA can make. Hedge (2000), for example, speaking from the teacher educator's point of view, noted that it would be a mistake "to assume that research in the contributing disciplines produces an agreed theory on language use or language learning that we can apply in immediate and direct ways". Instead, "it is more a question of having a foundation of knowledge against which we can evaluate our own ideas about teaching and learning, to which we can apply for insights in our attempts to solve pedagogic problems" (p.2).

I will illustrate (2) – the approach I favour – with reference to what the pedagogic discourse found in the teacher guides and the research-based discourse of SLA have had to say about oral corrective feedback. I will take as my starting point what some popular teacher guides advise regarding corrective feedback.

### Corrective feedback in language pedagogy

All the teacher guides I have inspected address the importance of providing both positive feedback as well as negative feedback (i.e. corrective feedback). Nunan (1991), in fact, devotes more attention to positive feedback than corrective feedback (CF). He noted that it serves two functions – 'to let students know they have performed correctly' and 'to increase motivation through praise' (p. 195). Praising students is seen as an important way of fostering positive attitudes to learning. Correcting students may be deemed necessary but it is also seen as potentially dangerous because it can damage learners' receptivity to learning. Therefore it needs to be given 'in an atmosphere of support and warm solidarity' (Ur, 1996; p. 255). There is a clear recognition in the discourse of language pedagogy of both the affective and cognitive dimensions of CF (Vigil & Oller, 1976) but all the teacher guides stress the affective dimension and express concern about the dangers of corrective feedback.

In a seminal article, Hendrickson (1978) addressed five central questions about corrective feedback. These questions serve as a basis for examining how corrective feedback is handled in the teacher guides.

1. Should learners' errors be corrected?

Ur (1996) noted that the value attributed to oral CF in language pedagogy varies in different methods. For example, in audiolingualism 'negative assessment is to be avoided as far as possible since it functions as 'punishment' and may inhibit or discourage learning', in humanistic methods 'assessment should be positive or non-judgemental' in order to 'promote a positive self-image of the learner as a person and language learner', while in skill-learning theory 'the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing' (ibid, p. 243). However, in the post-method era, language teaching methodologists are less inclined to be prescriptive about CF. Ur, for example, recognized that 'there is certainly a place for correction' but 'we should not over-estimate this contribution'

because it often fails to eliminate errors. She concluded that she would rather invest time in avoiding errors than in correcting them.

Other methodologists argue that CF has a place in 'accuracy' work but not in 'fluency work'. Harmer (1983), for example, suggested that when students are engaged in a communicative activity, the teacher should not intervene by 'telling students that they are making mistakes' or 'insisting on accuracy' (p. 44). Scrivener (2005) supported a similar position:

If the objective is accuracy, then immediate correction is likely to be useful; if the aim is fluency, then lengthy, immediate correction that diverts from the slow of speaking is less appropriate. (p. 299)

However, he did allow for 'brief, unobtrusive, immediate correction' in fluency work. He also suggested that teachers should make a list of the errors their students make in a fluency activity and address them when the activity is over. Ur (1996) also considered that it is sometimes appropriate to correct during fluency work ('gentle, supportive intervention' can help the 'floundering student'). She also noted that it was not always desirable to correct during accuracy work (e.g. if a student has contributed an interesting, personal comment that contains an error).

## 2. When should learner errors be corrected?

In the case of oral CF, teachers have the option of either correcting immediately an error occurs or making a note of the errors and delaying correction until later. Hedge (2000) noted that the teachers' notes accompanying course books frequently instruct teachers to leave correction until the end of fluency activities. The rationale for this is that correction interferes with the attempt to communicate and also can make students anxious and thus less ready to take risks. In the case of accuracy work, however, the guides recommend immediate correction is needed although there are also differences of opinion. Gattegno (1972), for example, came out strongly in favour of not rushing in to correct learner errors even in accuracy work so as to 'give time to a student to make sense of mistakes' (p. 31).

## 3. Which errors should be corrected?

The teacher guides warn against over-correction and propose that teachers should be selective in the errors they correct. As Ur (1996) noted 'learners can only use just so much feedback information: to give too much may simply distract, discourage and actually detract from the value of learning' (p. 255). It should be noted, however, that learners often wish to be corrected (Cathcart & Olson, 1976).

The guides offer little advice, however, on which errors teachers should correct and which ones they should ignore. Where advice is offered, it draws on Corder's (1967) distinction between 'mistakes' (i.e. performance slips) and 'errors' (i.e. deviations resulting from gaps in competence), recommending that only the latter need to be corrected. An alternative suggestion is that teachers should address 'global' errors but ignore 'local' errors (Burt, 1975). However, the problems teachers inevitably face in determining whether a deviation is an error or a mistake or whether it is global or local are not considered.

#### 4. How should errors be corrected?

The guides propose a range of strategies for correcting oral errors. They include:

- Questioning the learner (e.g. “the teacher may say ‘Is that correct?’” - Harmer (1983 p.63)).
- Direct indication (e.g. “Tell the students that there is an error” - Scrivener (2005, p. 300)).
- Requesting clarification (e.g. “the teacher looks puzzled and requests clarification” – Hedge (2000, p. 291)).
- Requesting repetition (e.g. “the teacher simply asks the student to repeat what he has just said” – Harmer (1983, p. 62)).
- Echoing – (e.g. “the teacher may echo what the student has just said with a questioning intonation” – Harmer (1983, p. 62)).
- Using gesture (e.g. “the teacher moves his or her hand to indicate an error” – Hedge (2000, p. 291)).
- Modelling (e.g. the teacher ‘provides a model of the acceptable version’ – Ur (1996, p. 249)).
- Discuss the error (e.g. ‘Write the problem sentence on the board for discussion’ – Scrivener (2005, p. 301)).

Hendrickson (1978) identified the same strategies in his seminal article many years ago and these seem to have been handed down over time.

Two points stand out about this treatment of CF strategies. First, all the guides simply provide lists. There is no attempt to classify the strategies into general types (for example, strategies that provide learner with the correct form versus those that prompt them to produce it themselves). Second, the guides just provide descriptions of the different strategies without any examples taken from actual classroom interaction [2].

The guides are wary of recommending the use of any particular strategy. Hedge (2000), for example, simply concluded that teachers need to use a variety of strategies. There is a general preference for those strategies that require learners to correct their own errors. As Scrivener (2005) put it ‘people learn more by doing things themselves rather than being told about them’ (p. 3) although he also noted that simply giving the correct form ‘may be the quickest, most appropriate, most useful way of helping’ (p. 301). Of concern to all the guides is the importance of ‘encouraging, tactful correction’ (Ur, 1996, p. 249) by being ‘gentle’, ‘hesitant’ and ‘supportive’. Once again, then, we see the emphasis on the affective aspect of CF.

#### 5. Who should do the correcting?

There are three possible answers to this question – the teacher, the student who made the error, or another student. Nunan (1988) reported that the students he surveyed tended to value correction

when it was provided by the teacher and gave self-discovery of errors a low rating. However, the guides propose otherwise. Hedge (2000) and Scrivener (2005), for example, advise giving students the opportunity to self-correct and, if that fails, inviting another student to perform the correction. Direct, teacher correction is the least favoured option and, if it is necessary, to ensure that the student who made the error produces the correct form.

### *Summary*

There is a large pedagogical literature dealing with corrective feedback and I have only touched on a small section of it. In addition to the guides I inspected, there are complete books devoted to it – e.g. Edge's (1989) *Mistakes and Correction* and Mishra's (2005) *Correction of Error in English*. A wide range of pedagogical practice is reflected in this literature but it is also clear that there is a broad consensus about what constitutes effective practice:

1. Positive feedback is as if not more important than negative feedback.
2. When teachers correct errors, they need to do so in a manner that does not have a negative impact on learners.
3. In oral fluency work, where the focus is on communicating, correction should be avoided or postponed until the activity is completed.
4. There is a danger of over-correcting so teachers need to be selective in the errors they correct but no clear or practical proposals regarding which errors to correct are available.
5. Teachers should employ a wide variety of corrective strategies, giving preference to those strategies that foster learners' ability to correct their own errors.
6. Direct teacher correction is the least favoured option but may sometimes be necessary.

Missing from all the guides I have examined is any consideration of how corrective feedback assists learning.

### **Corrective feedback in SLA**

Corrective feedback has received attention from researchers since the 1970s. Much of the earlier work (e.g. Allwright, 1975; Chaudron, 1977) was descriptive in nature, based on analysis of the various strategies that teachers use when correcting learners' errors in the classroom. More recent research (e.g. Lyster, 2004; Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006) has been experimental, aimed at investigating the relative effectiveness of different types of strategies on L2 learning. A number of meta-analyses of the experimental research have also been published (Russell & Spada, 2006; Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010).

This intense interest in corrective feedback is motivated in part by the need for empirical evidence to serve as a basis for pedagogical recommendations. But there are also theoretical reasons. Investigating corrective feedback serves as a means of testing the claims of rival theories of L2

acquisition. According to Schwartz (1986), negative evidence plays no role in Universal Grammar (UG)-based acquisition as it only contributes to explicit knowledge and there is no mechanism that can 'translate' this into input of the type required by UG. It follows, therefore, that corrective feedback has no substantive role to play in L2 acquisition [3].

In contrast, cognitive theories (e.g. Long, 1996; Lyster, 2004) view corrective feedback as facilitative of L2 acquisition and, for those grammatical features that are not readily acquirable from positive evidence (e.g. redundant features such as 3<sup>rd</sup> person-s), as even necessary. Sociocultural theory (SCT) also provides support for corrective feedback as it helps to scaffold learning in social interaction and assist the subsequent internalization of new linguistic forms (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). However, these theoretical positions that lend support to corrective feedback do not agree on which type of CF is best equipped to foster acquisition. Long (1996), drawing on the Interaction Hypothesis, emphasized the importance of the positive evidence afforded by recasts. In contrast, Lyster (2004) drew on skill-learning theory to claim that CF in the form of prompts leading to uptake-with-repair are more likely to lead to greater accuracy by enabling learners to gain greater control over those linguistic forms that they have already partially acquired. Ellis, Loewen and Erlam (2006) argued that for feedback to be effective it needs to ensure that the corrective force is clear to learners so that they notice the gap between their own production and the correction and that this is best achieved if the feedback is explicit rather than implicit. From the perspective of SCT, however, there is no single type of corrective feedback that is preferable; rather the feedback needs to be 'graduated' to provide the learner with the minimal level of assistance needed for repair to occur. This involves finding the least explicit form of correction that will elicit self-correction by the learner.

Based on these theoretical positions, the empirical research has addressed four key questions. I will briefly review the main findings related to each question.

1. What are the main corrective feedback strategies?

Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified six basic strategies based on their analysis of the different ways teachers corrected students in a French immersion classroom:

- a. Explicit correction (i.e. the teacher clearly indicates that what the student said was incorrect and also provides the correct form).
- b. Recasts (i.e. the teacher reformulates all or part of student's utterance replacing the erroneous part with the correct target language form).
- c. Clarification requests (i.e. the teacher indicates that a learner utterance has been misunderstood or is ill-formed in some way).
- d. Metalinguistic comments (i.e. the teacher comments on or questions the well-formedness of the learner's utterance without explicitly providing the correct form).
- e. Elicitation (i.e. the teacher (1) elicits completion of his/her own utterance, (2) uses a question to elicit the correct form, (3) asks a student to reformulate his/her utterance).
- f. Repetition (i.e. the teacher repeats the student's erroneous utterance with or without emphasis on the erroneous part).

These six strategies differ in two key ways; (1) they can be input-providing (i.e., they provide the learners with the correct target form) or output-prompting (i.e., they 'push' learners to self-correct their own errors) and (2) they can be implicit (i.e., the corrective force remains covert) or explicit (i.e. the corrective force is made clear to the learners). Based on these two dimensions, Ellis (2012) proposed the classification of CF strategies shown in Table 2. These strategies are not always used in isolation. Teachers often employ multiple strategies to correct an error.

Table 2: A classification of CF strategies

	Implicit	Explicit
Input-providing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recasts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit correction</li> </ul>
Output-prompting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repetitions</li> <li>• Clarification requests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metalinguistic comments</li> <li>• Elicitation</li> </ul>

## 2. Does CF assist L2 acquisition?

Meta-analyses of studies that have investigated the effect of CF on acquisition show that CF is indeed effective in assisting acquisition. Li (2010), for example, meta-analysed a total of 33 oral CF studies involving 1,773 learners. He reported that 'corrective feedback had a medium effect on acquisition' (p. 335). This effect was evident in tests immediately following the treatment involving CF and over time. However, he also reported that the effect was much greater in studies carried out in a laboratory than in a classroom. Li also found that the effect of CF was greater in foreign language than in second language settings and suggested that this might be because learners in the former are more predisposed to pay attention to the corrections they receive. Further evidence of the importance of the salience of the feedback as a factor influencing its effectiveness can be found in another variable Li investigated; CF proved more effective in treatments that involved discrete-item practice of grammatical structures (e.g. in drills), where the feedback is intensive and more likely to be noticed, than in communicative activities. A key issue in determining whether CF has any effect is the nature of the tests used to measure learning. Li also investigated this, reporting that the effects of CF were evident in both tests that measured controlled language use and free production. Two general conclusions can be drawn from Li's meta-analysis; (1) oral CF does assist L2 acquisition and (2) it is more likely to be effective in macro- and micro-contexts where it is salient to learners.

Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994), in the study referred to above, showed how the degree of scaffolding provided by the tutor for a particular learner diminished over time (i.e., whereas at one time the instructor needed to correct quite explicitly to enable a learner to self-correct, at a later time more implicit correction sufficed). In accordance with how learning is conceptualized in sociocultural theory, they argued that this demonstrated that learning was taking place. A later study (Erlam, Ellis & Batstone, 2013), however, failed to find evidence of any systematic reduction in the graduated assistance provided by a writing tutor over time.



### 3. Which type of CF is most effective in assisting L2 acquisition?

The two theoretical frameworks that inform oral CF research have taken very different positions regarding this issue. Research conducted within a cognitive-interactionist framework has investigated the two dimensions of CF shown in Table 2 (i.e. input-providing vs. output-prompting and implicit vs. explicit CF). The underlying assumption is that not all types of CF are equally effective and therefore, the primary goal of CF research should be to establish which type works best. In contrast, research conducted within a sociocultural framework is based on the assumption that for CF to be effective it needs to be systematically tailored to the learner's developmental level and that no one type of CF will work best.

Several studies (e.g. Lyster, 2004; Ammar & Spada, 2006; Yang & Lyster, 2010) have shown that prompts are more effective than recasts. However, a number of caveats are in order. First, recasts constitute a single corrective strategy whereas the prompts investigated in these studies included four different strategies (i.e. clarification requests, repetition of error, elicitation and metalinguistic clues). It is possible that the greater effect found for prompts is simply because multiple strategies are more effective than a single strategy (a view compatible with sociocultural theory). Also, the prompts included a mixture of implicit and explicit strategies so it is possible that they are more effective not because they elicit self-correction but because they are more salient. To address this issue, Mifka-Profozic (2012) compared recasts with an implicit type of prompt (clarification requests) and found the former more effective in enabling high school learners of L2 French to improve accuracy in the use of *passé composé* and *imparfait*. A third caveat is that the effects of the two types of CF are likely to be mediated by the instructional tenor of the classroom (i.e. whether it is primarily meaning or form-focused) – see Lyster & Mori (2006). Recasts are effective in classrooms where learners are focused on form.

Studies that have investigated the relative effect of implicit and explicit CF by comparing recasts with explicit correction or metalinguistic comments have produced less ambiguous results (see Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006). Li's (2010) meta-analysis reported that explicit CF was more effective than implicit CF. However, Li also reported that implicit CF proved to be more effective in post-tests completed a long time after the instruction. This was because its effects increased over time whereas those of explicit CF did not. It should be noted, however, that recasts (the implicit CF strategy most commonly investigated) do not really constitute a single type of CF but vary considerably in how implicit or explicit they are and that more explicit types of recasts have been shown more likely to promote learning.

Two studies (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Nassaji & Swain, 2000) support the claims of sociocultural theory – namely, that fine-tuning corrective feedback to the learner's level of development assists development. However, both studies were small-scale and the advantage claimed for 'graduated feedback' needs further investigation. In more recent sociocultural studies the focus has switched away from investigating corrective feedback to 'languaging' (i.e., occasions where learners make a linguistic form the topic of their talk) [4].

### 4. Does learner self-correction following CF (i.e. uptake) contribute to L2 acquisition?

Some researchers have argued that successful uptake is important for acquisition. That is, they have suggested that when learners self-correct their errors they are more likely to benefit from CF. Lyster and Ranta (1997) showed that learner repair of lexical and grammatical errors was more likely after elicitations, requests for clarification, and metalinguistic clues (i.e., prompts) than other types, in particular recasts. One reason why repair does not occur after recasts is because teachers often

continue without giving students a chance to respond, as Oliver's (2000) study of recasts in an ESL classroom showed.

The importance of learners self-correcting their errors for acquisition, however, is a matter of controversy. Some researchers (e.g. Long, 2006) have argued that recasts assist learning by inducing learners to notice the correction and that whether they subsequently uptake the correction is immaterial. Other researchers (e.g. Lyster, 2004) draw on skill-learning theory to argue that uptake of the correction is important for acquisition as it leads to 'deeper processing'. To date, however, there is only limited evidence to show that uptake-with-repair enhances the effect of corrective feedback.

### **Re-examining the role of corrective feedback in language pedagogy**

I have already noted that the teacher guides pay little attention to corrective feedback research. It might be argued, given the theoretical disputations surrounding the study of corrective feedback, that this is a wise course of action. These theories differ both in terms of whether they see CF as contributing to acquisition and in terms of which type or approach to CF as most facilitative. Perhaps, then, it is better that the authors of the guides rely on their own experience and of received opinion about what constitutes effective practice. To adopt such a position, however, would be to claim that the research-based discourse of SLA has nothing of value to offer the pedagogic discourse intended for teachers. The empirical CF research, however, does offer insights of potential value to teachers.

I noted that the teacher guides emphasize the affective aspect of CF. In contrast, the SLA research has addressed the cognitive aspects of CF. Have the guides tended to overplay the importance of avoiding CF or of conducting it in a sensitive and tactful manner? The prevalence of recasts (see Seedhouse, 2004) might be the result of teachers heeding the advice they received in their training to attend to affect rather than effect. Of course, reasonable care does need to be paid to the negative impact that some forms of CF can have on learners. The guides are right to warn against offensive correction of the kind observed in this classroom in Iran:

S: Schools and banks are closed in Fridays.

T: No, not acceptable. You are not working hard as I expect you. You should have known that 'on' is used - NOT 'in' - for days of the week. We studied this point last semester.

But directness can be achieved in less authoritarian ways. Perhaps the importance attached to positive feedback and the reservations about negative feedback have been a little overstated in the guides. Familiarizing teachers with the research – or alternatively, encouraging them to do their own research - may help them to place greater value on the cognitive aspects of CF.

I will now return to the five key questions and reconsider the answers the guides gave to them in the light of the SLA research.

#### 1. Should learners' errors be corrected?

The guides all acknowledge the need for teachers to correct learners' oral errors. This receives clear support from the SLA research, which has shown that oral CF is effective in improving learners' accuracy. Ur (1996), while agreeing that correction is helpful, felt that it would be better for teachers to focus on avoiding errors rather than correcting them. From an SLA perspective, however, this

is doubtful. Learners are bound to make errors no matter what approach teachers adopt and certain types of error (i.e. those where positive evidence alone is not sufficient to ensure acquisition of the target form) may only be eliminated with the help of negative evidence.

In one respect, there is a clear difference in the pedagogic position adopted in many of the guides and the research evidence. The guides recommend making a clear distinction between accuracy-oriented and fluency-oriented instruction and claim that corrective feedback is desirable in the former but not in the latter as it will inhibit learners by causing them to focus on form rather than on meaning. However, a number of studies (e.g. Lyster, 2004; Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006) and Li's (2010) meta-analysis have shown that correcting learners while they are performing communicative tasks is effective.

## 2. When should learner errors be corrected?

Some teacher educators recommend delaying correction in fluency work until learners have completed an activity while approving of immediate correction in accuracy work. Cognitive theories of L2 acquisition suggest that corrective feedback will work best when it is offered in a 'window of opportunity' (Doughty, 2001) (i.e. immediately after an error has been committed). However, there are grounds for believing that delayed CF can also assist learning. It is possible that immediate and delayed CF contribute to acquisition in different ways. Immediate CF may benefit the development of learners' procedural knowledge whereas delayed CF is perhaps more likely to foster metalinguistic understanding as it encourages learners to reflect on the corrections they receive. Clearly, there is a need for more research investigating whether delayed CF is effective, what kind of knowledge it fosters, and, importantly, whether it is more effective than immediate CF [5].

## 3. Which errors should be corrected?

The various pedagogic proposals for deciding which errors to correct are hard to implement. It is unlikely that teachers will be able to distinguish between 'errors' and 'mistakes' in a consistent way. The suggestion that teachers should focus on 'global' rather than 'local' errors is also of doubtful value. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that CF is effective when it focuses on 'local' (e.g. morphological) errors that do not interfere with communication. Indeed, some morphological errors such as 3<sup>rd</sup> person-s may only be eliminated with the help of negative evidence.

Many of the CF studies investigated 'focused' CF and this potentially affords the most promising way of selecting which errors to correct. When teachers identify a persistent linguistic problem, they can design a task that provides a context for the use of the problematic feature and then provide extensive correction when errors occur in the performance of the task. Focused correction is practical and has been shown to be effective for addressing errors in oral production. Unfocused correction (i.e. CF directed at a range of different error types) is less likely to impact on learning.

## 4. How should errors be corrected?

The SLA research suggests a number of general principles that can guide the implementation of CF:

- CF needs to be intensive. A single correction directed at a linguistic feature cannot be expected to have much effect on learning. An advantage of focused CF is that it is intensive.

- Explicitness is important. For CF to be effective, learners need to recognize the corrective force of the CF.
- Teachers need to vary how they correct according to instructional context. In a fluency-oriented instructional context learners may fail to recognize a recast as corrective as they are primarily focused on meaning. In an accuracy-oriented context, however, they are more likely to treat a teacher's recast as corrective. This suggests that in a communicative activity, brief explicit forms of correction may be needed. In a grammar exercise, recasts can be effective.
- Input-providing and output-prompting CF strategies can be combined. One way of achieving this is by means of 'corrective recasts' as in this example from Doughty & Varela (1998):

L: I think that the worm will go under the soil.

T: I think that the worm will go under the soil?

L: (no response)

T: I thought that the worm would go under the soil.

L: I thought that the worm would go under the soil.

In a corrective recast, the teacher first prompts learners to self-correct and then, if that fails, provides a recast.

- Encourage uptake with repair. Learning can take place without uptake providing learners notice the correction. But inducing learners to produce the correct form may lead to deeper processing. In this respect, the SLA research lends support to the recommendation of the guides which emphasize the need to ensure learners successfully uptake the correction.

These principles are based on a cognitive-interactionist view of CF. Socio-cultural theory emphasises the need for 'graduated assistance'. The studies that have investigated this have done so in one-on-one interactions between a teacher and a learner but it is not yet clear how 'graduated assistance' can be achieved in whole classes

##### 5. Who should do the correcting?

The guides express a clear preference for eliciting a self-repair from the students by means of prompts. Lyster's research lends support to such a position. But there is also evidence that input-providing types of feedback (e.g. recasts) that do not result in uptake-with-repair are effective. Perhaps the guides over-emphasise the merits of ensuring self-correction. The research certainly suggests that teachers need not be reluctant to 'other-correct'. There is no support for the other suggestion found in the guides, namely nominating another student to 'other-repair'. In fact, this way of correcting errors has been found to occur only rarely in classrooms (Seedhouse, 2004).

## Conclusion

The contribution that SLA studies can make to language pedagogy is a topic of considerable interest (Tarone, Cohen & Dumas, 1976; Hatch, 1978; Krashen, 1983; Lightbown, 1985, 2000; Long, 1990, 2006; Nunan, 1991; Schachter, 1993; Ellis, 2010; Van Lier, 1994; Gass, 1995; Kramsch, 2000). However, as this list of citations demonstrates it is mainly SLA researchers who have addressed this topic. Teachers and teacher educators have shown much less interest in it. By and large, the teacher guides I inspected have paid scant attention to SLA research, reflecting perhaps its inaccessibility and perceived lack of relevance to the practical concerns of teachers. Thus the nexus between language pedagogy and SLA remains difficult and tenuous.

The problem is one of 'mediation'. Widdowson (1984) argued that 'it is the responsibility of applied linguists to consider the criteria for an educationally relevant approach to language' (p. 17) and went on to say that this could not be achieved by simply applying linguistic theory. So the question is how can disciplinary knowledge inform a practical field such as language pedagogy? Widdowson proposed that the first step is 'appraisal'. This involves interpretation (i.e., the explication of ideas within their own terms of reference) followed by conceptual evaluation ('the process of specifying what might be called the transfer value of ideas' (p. 31)). The second step is application, which can be achieved through 'operation' where specific techniques are proposed based on the conclusions of the conceptual evaluation. An alternative way is to subject specific techniques taken from teachers' customary practices and subject them to scrutiny by drawing on the results of a prior conceptual evaluation.

Widdowson's model is intended to relate 'theory' to 'practice'. I doubt, though, whether his model really achieves this if 'practice' is defined as the moment-by-moment interactions of which teaching is ultimately composed. The model is better seen as an attempt to explain how the research-based discourse of applied linguistics can inform pedagogic discourse. In other words, Widdowson's 'practice' is not actual practice but rather proposals for practice. Re-interpreted in this way, however, the model encapsulates the two ways of building a bridge between SLA and language pedagogy.

Lightbown (2000) offered ten generalizations about L2 learning drawn from SLA research. These constitute an 'appraisal'. She interpreted the SLA research and subjected it to a conceptual evaluation to establish ideas that could inform pedagogy. Lightbown, however, was wary of 'application'. She commented:

... when researchers make strong claims that are at odds with the views teachers have developed through their experience with learners, and when those claims are made on the basis of research which has been done in contexts which do not reflect reality as the teachers know it, they are likely to alienate teachers and lead them to dismiss researchers as ivory tower oddities. (2000, p. 453)

She went on to argue that SLA serves best as a basis for helping teachers to question their own intuitions about teaching rather than as a source of specific proposals.

The alternative way of accomplishing 'application' involves taking the received opinions about teaching as expressed in teacher guides as the starting point and then subjecting these to a conceptual evaluation through reference to relevant SLA research. This is the approach I have attempted to illustrate in this article. This approach rests on the identification of interface issues. Corrective feedback is clearly an aspect of instruction where the concerns of teachers and interests

of SLA researchers coincide and, as such, it is an ideal construct for examining the contribution that SLA can make to language pedagogy.

There are many other interface issues – explicit L2 instruction, the relative contributions of comprehension-based and production-based instruction, small group-work, teacher-talk, the role of the L1 in the L2 classroom and how to cater for individual differences in learners. These are areas where the views expressed in the teacher guides can be examined against the findings of SLA research. The advantage of this approach is that it avoids the problem Lightbown identified (i.e., the danger of making strong claims that are at odds with teachers' views) and led her to hold back on 'application'. This danger can be avoided if the starting point is not the research-based discourse of SLA but the pedagogic-discourse of teacher guides.

Many teacher education programmes include an 'SLA course' which offers a selective coverage of the wide-ranging theory and research in SLA. Perhaps the time has come to rethink how SLA is incorporated into programmes for teachers. Relevance and transfer of knowledge may be better achieved by identifying key interface issues – such as corrective feedback – and examining the extent to which current pedagogic views are supported or challenged by SLA research.

## Notes

1. I acknowledge that the distinction between pedagogic discourse and the research-based discourse of SLA is not always clear cut. Some (but certainly not all) of the authors of the teacher guides are familiar with SLA theory and research findings and draw on these in shaping the advice they offer teachers. Also, some of the writings of some SLA researchers (myself, for example) are both 'pedagogic' and 'research-based'. Clearly there are hybrid discourses.
2. Ur (1996), however, proposed that teachers use her list of strategies to carry out an observation of how CF is carried out in an actual lesson.
3. Not all UG-oriented researchers reject a role for negative evidence. White (1991), for example, claimed that it can trigger parameter setting and thus enable learners to identify the correct target language parameter.
4. 'Languaging' includes corrective feedback. However, not all instances of 'languaging' constitute corrective feedback. For example, learners may focus on a specific linguistic form when deciding how to formulate an utterance (i.e. when no error has occurred).
5. See Dabaghi (2010) for an attempt to investigate the effects of delayed CF on L2 learning.

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