

# Shared Identities: Our Interweaving Threads



## Interactive Feedback in the Power-Up! Tutorial

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### Reference data:

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This report presents an exploratory study of Interactive Feedback, which includes corrective feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997) and affective and cognitive feedback (Vigil & Oller, 1976), in oral communication tutorials called the Power-Up! Tutorial. The author lists, defines, and exemplifies various types of Interactive Feedback, supported with evidence from tutorial transcripts. These transcripts represent 6 hours of instruction involving 12 teachers and 52 students in actual tutorials. After presenting and discussing various Interactive Feedback moves, this report offers several observations, pedagogical implications, and recommendations for further study.

このレポートは既に提唱されている補正的フィードバックcorrective feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997)、感情的、認知的フィードバック affective and cognitive feedback (Vigil & Oller, 1976)を含む相互的フィードバックについての研究を示している。研究対象は本学の「パワーアップチュートリアル」と呼ばれるオーラルコミュニケーションクラスである。本レポートは授業の SCRIPT を裏付けとして様々な相互的フィードバックを定義する。SCRIPT は12名のチューターと52名の生徒による6時間の実際の授業を文字化したものである。相互的フィードバックの詳細について考察した後、個々のフィードバックを分析し、教育現場に有益な推測を立て、最後に今後、本研究を発展させる為の提案を行う。

**T**here are many opinions about how teachers should react to students' spoken errors in oral communication classes. Teachers and tutors come from a variety of backgrounds and educational experiences which affect their beliefs towards error correction. In first year tutorials at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS), unique oral communication classes led to this pedagogical issue. With several tutors in each class, a debate arose amongst the tutors about how much and how often students should be corrected. In line with the goals of the course of improving students' confidence and fluency, I began looking at research about error correction and came across the work of Roy Lyster from McGill University in Montreal, Canada. Lyster, along with Ranta (1997) and later with Mori (2006), researched error correction (EC) or corrective feedback (CF) in French immersion classes. From their research, Lyster and Mori supported the importance of not only comprehensible input for successful L2 learning but also comprehensible output. According to Lyster and Ranta, (1997) "producing comprehensible output entails the provision of useful and consistent feedback from teachers and peers" (p. 41). In addition, "language factors

can be made more salient in the input during the subject-matter lessons as teachers interact with students” (p. 41). To obtain their data, Lyster and Mori made audio recordings of classes, coded the data and categorized it according to different EC moves. Similarly to Lyster and Ranta, I wanted to obtain a better understanding of what was happening in my classes. I wanted to obtain an idea of the frequency and the kinds of feedback the tutors were giving the students. With the permission of my students and tutors, I began videotaping classes and looking at the interactions between teachers and students. These required courses for first-year students, called *Power Up! Tutorials* provided a rich environment to observe teacher-student negotiation.

### Corrective feedback definitions and an affective balance

Lyster and Ranta (1997) described six main *corrective moves*, a “move” consisting of an action and reaction between student and teacher. While Lyster and Ranta’s definitions helped explain what I was observing in my classes, I felt there were more things going on that were yet undefined, specifically emotional factors that were influencing teacher-student interactions. In order to more fully explain the feedback I was observing, I decided to include Vigil and Oller’s (1976) *affective feedback*. Brown (2007) described affective feedback as “information [that] is primarily encoded in terms of kinesthetic mechanisms such as gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions” (p. 271). Some examples are reinforcement, encouragement and praise. By combining these affective moves with Lyster and Ranta’s more cognitive moves, I had a more descriptive way

of looking at the interactions between teachers and students in my class. The combination of the Lyster and Ranta’s corrective feedback and Vigil and Oller’s affective feedback were merged together with a new title: *Interactive Feedback* (IF).

### Instructional context

Of importance to this research is the unique instructional context. All NUS first year students are required to take an oral communication class known as *Power Up! Tutorial* (PUT). While the curriculum differs among departments, one constant is a three-to-one teacher-student ratio in all PUT classes. In my department, the School of Contemporary International Studies, the goals of the class are to increase: students’ confidence in speaking English, oral communication skills, strategic competence, active engagement and learner autonomy. Classroom procedure is to have an introduction or re-introduction to the material in the first 15 minutes, followed by three consecutive 20-minute blocks for recursive practice, concluding with an introduction to the topic for the next class in the final 15 minutes. Students converse on topics assigned by the class leader. Examples of topics include Hobbies and Interests, Part-time Jobs, Famous Faces, Family and Friends, Perfect Holiday, Million Dollars, etc. Students make cards as homework and write ideas (not complete sentences) on the cards to prepare them to speak. The cards serve as a way to support the students during class and also to get them invested in the topic. Students practice their conversations, receive advice from their tutor and have a chance to talk about the same topics with different students and a different

tutor. This type of repetition has been defined by Kindt (2005) as *recursive practice* or “successive practice with meaning”.

### Procedure and data collection

In order to investigate IF in the PUT, a close examination of interaction patterns between the students at their tables discussing the weekly topic with their teachers was needed. A total of 52 students and 12 teachers were videotaped in 18 conversations that averaged 20 minutes in length. The conversations were based on the topic of the week, emphasizing conversation strategies that were presented in the beginning of class. The conversations involved two or three students and one teacher, and no grammar drills or comprehension type practice was involved. Teachers were, however, instructed to give advice before students moved on to different tables.

After recording, the videos were transcribed, but only for instances of feedback between tutors and students. These instances were classified, defined, and exemplified according to Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) correctional moves or Virgil and Oller’s (1976) affective or cognitive feedback.

### Observations

#### *Corrective feedback*

The most common type of error correction found in the PUT data was *recasts*, or implicit reformulations of all or part of a student’s utterance (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 54). According to Lyster and Mori (2006), “recasts are ideal for facilitating the delivery of complex subject matter because they provide

supportive, scaffolded help, which serves to move lessons ahead when the target forms in question are beyond the students’ current abilities” (p. 273). By using a recast, tutors can quickly offer a correction and keep the conversation going.

#### *Recast:*

S: What’s new? Uh... Yesterday night...

T: Last night.

S: Last night I called with my friends for too long.

Much less frequently observed were *explicit corrections*. These were usually used by the tutor only when the conversation broke down and a grammatical explanation or example was necessary. In line with the goal of this class being to produce English, long-winded explanations from tutors were not encouraged and seldom observed. However, some tutors discussed explicit corrections in the free time at the end of the conversations.

#### *Explicit correction:*

S: Steal a person. Steal Mr. Johnston in terrorists’ house.

T: Terrorists stole him... Or maybe you can say took him. Maybe he didn’t want to go. We say “kidnap.”

Also commonly found in PUT transcripts was evidence of *elicitation*, *clarification requests* and *repetition*. These moves have been combined to be called *prompts* with the common factor that all three offer the students the chance for self-repair. These moves are in line with the conversational

context of the course. By eliciting, asking for clarification, or repetition, the tutor is able to have the student attend to form while still maintaining their conversation.

**Elicitation:**

T: Wait, wait, wait. One more time. He...

S: Got...

**Clarification request:**

S: What is German food famous for?

T: Huh? One more time.

**Repetition:**

S1: What would you eat there?

S2: I would eat coconut milk.

T: Wait. You would *eat* coconut juice?

S2: Ah, drink.

There were few instances of *metalinguistic clues* in the PUT data. Explicit corrections and metalinguistic clues differ only in that explicit corrections contain the correct form of the error and metalinguistic clues do not. As noted, some tutors gave explicit corrections when conversation broke down or at free time at the end of a conversation. However, it was uncommon to see a tutor giving metalinguistic clues as a corrective move. Possibly, when a tutor decided an explanation was necessary, there was no need to hint to the students about what was incorrect.

**Affective feedback**

In addition to the corrective feedback moves defined by Lyster, there were also numerous instances of affective feedback observed in the PUT class. These included providing students with reinforcement, encouragement, and praise through gestures, tone of voice, or facial expressions. In the first example, a teacher gives affective feedback in order to *reinforce* what he wants the students to do.

T: So if you don't understand remember you gotta ask, "Sorry, did you say...?" "What did you say?" Clarify...

In this case, a teacher uses affective feedback to *encourage* students before they begin their conversations:

T: Not. You're going tell your story. And once you finish your story, you can ask your opinion, what you think of this story. And have a conversation. *Very easy...relax.*

S: Uh-huh.

Another teacher uses *praise* to encourage his students:

T: Yeah. Of course not on purpose. They were...

S: Careless.

T: *Very good.* I was waiting for you to say that. They were very careless.

According to Brown (2007) *positive* affective feedback "is imperative to the learner's desire to continue attempts to communicate" (p. 270). Thus affective feedback can be a powerful tool when course goals are to increase confidence. In the same way a child can benefit from encouragement to

ride a bicycle for the first time, language learners can also benefit from encouragement to produce English and try to convey meaning, especially when cultural barriers may be holding them back.

### *Other types of feedback*

Besides exploring corrective and affective feedback, I also considered other phenomena that related to IF in the data.

### *Missed opportunity*

One of the main responsibilities of tutors in the PUT class is to be a source of feedback to students. However often fatigue or repetition can distract even the most determined tutor. It was sometimes observed that tutors were not responding to student mistakes and therefore missing an opportunity to offer corrective feedback. In this conversation a teacher seems unaware of the opportunity for productive feedback.

S1: If this present situation continues, Japanese people will be able to write Japanese language.

T: One more time, "If this present situation continues..."

S2: If this present situation continues, Japanese people will be unable to...

T: Unable, okay.

S1: Unable...to write Japanese language.

T: Why?

### *Unintentional feedback*

Tutors rely on uptake, comments, and reactions from students to judge if their feedback is effective. However, sometimes tutors repeat information or even give unnecessary information to students. In the following interaction, the teacher gave feedback to the student before realizing the student had already finished.

T: [Pointing to text] So you can ask these questions here. You can ask that question, "Do you know?" Oh, you already asked that.

S: [Laughing]

### *Selective feedback*

In the context of a communicative class, tutors are forced to make judgments on what errors to correct when giving feedback to students. Tutors consider the language or focus of the topic or the lesson, the level of the student, and even the meaning the student is trying to convey in the particular conversation – a "heat of the moment" judgment. In the following interaction, the tutor chooses to correct only one of several mistakes.

S: I heard recently old people want to work long time, so I agree. They should work...

T: They should continue...

### *Feedback avoidance*

The data contained instances of several tutors avoiding feedback all together. Future research would benefit from

looking at what tutors' motives are in giving feedback. In this instance, the tutor could watch the video of the conversation and explain why there was no feedback to the student.

- S: For example, Aomori's salary is cheaper than Nagoya or Tokyo.
- T: Aomori is a rural area in Japan?
- S: Rural. Yes.
- T: And their salaries are...cheaper.
- S: Much cheaper.
- T: Much cheaper. So McDonald's will lower prices in rural areas

### *Detrimental feedback*

Although tutors are human and get tired or even have bad days, being negative to a student can send many messages. A yawn may tell the students you are not listening. Raising your eyebrows may tell them you do not care about their opinion. Other negative comments, for example, saying something detrimental about a student's intelligence, may have an effect on tutor-student relations:

- T: He was captured by a what?
- S: I don't understand...what is a terrorist?
- T: I can't believe you don't know that.

### **Implications and further study**

#### *Teachers and students need a basic awareness of Interactive Feedback*

Class leaders could use IF in particular contexts depending on student needs and levels. If Tutors were aware and familiar with the various IF types, class leaders could specify which ones to emphasize for that particular class. For example, lower classes could benefit from scaffolding or recast while higher level classes talking about difficult discussion materials might be better served to use elicitation moves.

Students could also benefit from an awareness of the different types of IF and likely have a better understanding of how and why the teachers are correcting their errors.

#### *An emphasis on elicitation and self-correction*

The PUT course emphasizes the production of English, the building of students' confidence, and the importance of self-correction. Teachers should consider these factors when using IF.

Although there is often a temptation to correct every error a student makes, the teacher may be doing it to appease his or her own conscious and not thinking of the goals of the course. Teachers would benefit from using IF types that are in-line with the objectives of the course and not randomly correcting errors.

In the context of this research, teachers should help students to be aware that errors are a natural and necessary part of the learning process and that the effort to self-correct is beneficial (Alanen, 1995; Carroll & Swain, 1993).

### Using affective feedback

Lyster and Ranta use CF to define and describe possible ways of feedback between teachers and students. However, I felt emotional factors were not being given enough consideration and used affective feedback to define some of them. H. Douglas Brown (2007) cites the following affective factors amongst others as being important to second language acquisition: 1) self-esteem, 2) willingness to communicate, 3) inhibition, 4) risk taking, 5) anxiety, and 6) extroversion. All of these factors are dependent upon positive affective feedback and show the need for encouragement and praise at times to increase confidence in speaking English.

### Consistency in teachers' Interactive Feedback

From the data there is an observable amount of variability in the IF procedures used by teachers. One effect this likely has on the students is that it forces them to adapt to individual teachers' tendencies. Building an awareness of the different types of IF and how to use them would clarify the role of the tutors and help them achieve consistency in the use of various IF moves depending on the needs of the students.

### Aligning tutor and student expectations

From my own previous research in the PUT, most students indicated that they expected every error to be corrected (Miller 2007, p. 169). This research also showed that teachers, however, were less likely to correct an error depending on factors such as not wanting to interrupt the flow of the conversation or encouraging students to produce.

This gap in expectations could likely be realigned if teachers and students were more aware of the varieties of IF and a better understanding how to implement them.

### Future studies

Combining video data with a follow-up questionnaire or interviews is one way to further explore how students perceive feedback-related interactions in conversations. By having students look at utterances and instances of uptake, it would be easier to see which IF moves have an effect on longer term memory.

### Conclusion

Forced by a pedagogical issue to look at error correction in first-year oral communication courses, I searched for a way to define the feedback I was observing in my classes. I combined *corrective feedback*, which is primarily quantitative in nature, with the more descriptive *affective feedback*. The combination of the two, I now refer to as *Interactive Feedback*. Using IF, I was able to get a better understanding of what was happening in my classes such as teachers relying on the same IF moves, students unaware of IF moves or that they were even being corrected; and lack of IF at all. In conclusion, by making both tutors and students more aware of IF and a familiarity of IF moves, feedback in classes would be more effective.

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